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A WILY WIDOW.

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A WILY WIDOW

BY

HENRY CRESSWELL

AUTHOR OF

"A MODERN GREEK HEROINE," "THE SINS OF THE FATHERS,"
"INCOGNITA," "THE SURVIVORS," ETC.

"Beware of the wrath of the dove."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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A WILY WIDOW.

CHAPTER I.

'Yes, Brown, you are right. It will make a deal of difference who gets the place. Well: good-night.'

With his great-coat collar turned up high about his ears (for the October night was cold) Dr. Gregg descended the steps of the South Western Bank, Lynham; and directed his steps towards his own house at the other end of the street.

Brown was quite right. It would make a deal of difference who got the place.

For instance, if a large family came to live there, wealthy, but none of them in good health, that would make a difference to Doctor Gregg himself. Or a man of position with a little public spirit; that would be a God-send to everyone. Whereas, on the contrary, if the place again fell into the hands of a miserly old hunks, there would be one more chance lost for Lynham. And at Lynham, 'chances' were rare.

The little town of Lynham—it is not worth while to look for it on the map—lies hidden, in one of the most sequestered parts of the Dorsetshire coast, in a narrow and secluded valley, shut in on every side from the surrounding world by high, steep hills. No one has yet thought of making a 'sea-front' at Lynham, nor of inventing curious diagrams to show how much more

the sun shines and how much less rain falls there than anywhere else in England; nor even of discovering that the climate—like that of all the known watering-places—is a certain cure for most of the ills that hurry poor humanity to the tomb. So Lynham remains a primitive little place. Down by the beach there is an old church on one side of the narrow valley, and on the other side a small, and very tolerable, old-fashioned inn that calls itself the 'London Hotel.' Between the two a little esplanade extends, built by the munificence of a former lord of the manor, and believed by the natives to be one of the finest promenades in Europe. Then there is a High Street, and a Church Street, and three or four other streets, with about a dozen houses in each of them; and after that only cottages and

the rectory, and a few picturesque little houses dotted here and there; one, untenanted, up the Mill Lane, a pretty little place covered with jasmine, and another, even more secluded, nearly a mile out of the town in a hollow on the cliff, called Cliff Cottage: of which more anon.

In the same direction, but further inland is Lynhurst, once the country seat of the Lynhursts of Lynhurst, lords of the manor of Lynham, and county people of a little importance. The family is now extinct. The last of the Lynhursts (he who built the esplanade) ruined himself with speculation, and expensive faddles, and afterwards died childless. Lynhurst was sold, and passed rapidly from owner to owner, faring ever worse and worse, until the poverty of some, and the neglect of others, and the indif-

ference of all, had reduced the estate—sadly curtailed of its original proportions—to a miserable condition of ruin and dilapidation.

It had been a pretty spot. Not, it is true, one of those stately homes that are fairy-lands of rolling lawns, and glassy lakes, and lordly forest trees; but a fair place, with woods climbing the hills, and a broad, well-timbered valley opening before the house, and a glimpse in the distance of the Channel. The mansion itself, the last of the Lynhursts rebuilt. It was a largish house, of two storeys, forming three sides of a square with a long verandah in front, not very picturesque, but, within, roomy and comfortable; though, like everything else at Lynhurst, fallen into a shockingly ruinous condition.

Still, of course, the place might be done up, the house restored, and the dilapidations of the estate put into repair, and then Lynhurst might be as pretty a spot as ever. Nature does not wear out. And if some one would come with a pocket full of money, and do all that, that would be a fine thing for Lynham.

For the last fifteen years Lynhurst had been in the possession of a particularly sour and unsociable old bachelor, who had been in evil odour with everyone. Undeniably he had allowed the place to go to rack and ruin in a shameful way, and he was niggardly and mean to a degree. But perhaps the old fellow could have told some things his neighbours little suspected. How hard it was for him to find the money to pay the interest on the crushing mortgages, and what sort of

weight that is which falls on an old man's heart when his circumstances demand of him the spirit and energies of youth. At any rate, the old gentleman's shortcomings do not concern this story. At the time when it begins he had just been buried a week, and all Lynham was on the tiptoe of curiosity; and everyone, except the very poorest—the only persons in the place whose occupations were large enough to fill their lives—was talking about who would have Lynhurst, and what would ensue.

As Brown the banker said, it would make a deal of difference who got the place. And Dr. Gregg was not the only person who agreed with him.

A tall, thin man was the doctor, with light hair and whiskers, and a rather cadaverous face that seemed to be entirely

made of sharp points—sharp cheek-bones, a sharp nose, a sharp chin, sharp pointed lips, sharp ends to his short whiskers, and a sharply prominent forehead.

But the doctor had not at all the air of being intellectually a sharp man. Rather the contrary. As is mostly the case with these pointed-faced people, he looked like a vague man.

The doctor soon reached his own home. It was a double-fronted house, with iron railings before it, and wire blinds in the lower windows. Two very large brass plates, one attached to the iron railings, and the other to the surgery door, announced that Dr. G. Gregg was M.D., surgeon, and M.R.C.S., and neither the doctor himself nor any of his patients had ever observed that that was saying the same thing twice over.

The doctor hung up his coat and hat in the hall, and proceeded towards the drawing-room. A sound of eager conversation, mingled with merry laughter, came through the door. Mrs. Gregg had a Cambridge man staying in the house for a few days, and had asked one or two friends to tea. When the doctor entered, he found them all sitting round a table on which a pack of cards had been thrown aside. There is no occasion to describe particularly either the doctor's little wife or the rector's daughters, two plain, ladylike, countrified girls, without a trait to distinguish them from a thousand other of their class. But two other ladies sat at the round table who merited attention.

One of them was a young widow; a handsome brunette, in the opinion of some people a very handsome brunette, of five-

and-twenty, who looked younger than she was, in fact, of so girlish an appearance that her title of Mrs. seemed to be a mistake. Scarcely above the middle height, she had a pretty figure, and a charming head and neck. Her face was a striking face, finely chiselled, delicate, intellectual, with deeply cut features, and an expression a little sad, a little arch, a little reticent, a little romantic, and altogether very difficult to decipher. Men who looked at her once invariably looked at her again, to get some better understanding of her wide low forehead, and her deeply-shaded, dark, enigmatical eyes, her round, wilful chin, and her little mouth, firm, with narrow, blood-red lips. And if the low forehead appeared, on a second view, a morsel cruel, if her lips seemed to close a little coldly, who would have a brunette without steel

in her composition? At moments she looked like an unhappy woman, and she was no flirt, as the Cambridge undergraduate, who had been smitten on the spot, had discovered with regret.

The charms of the other were of a different kind.

This was simply a lively, pretty, frank young girl, fresh as a rose, with a broad dash of spirit in her fine eyes and her easy bearing. One look at her open brow, her clear blue eyes, sparkling like two stars, her guileless lips, and her fearless, direct regard, was enough to tell that she was of a generous nature, innately noble, and untainted, hitherto, by contact with the world. She was taller than the widow by a good inch, and so, distinctly above the average height, with a slight, girlish figure, a small waist, sloping shoulders,

and a long, flexible neck. Her face was rather small, a mignonne face, full of a certain artlessness, but saucy too, with a touch of childish *espièglerie* that lurked in her soft eyes, and her rosy cheeks, and about her little dimpled chin. Her eyebrows were exquisitely pencilled, arched, and two or three shades darker than her hair, of a light, soft brown—crisp and abundant. Her ripe little lips had a look of such sweetness, with such an air, too, of 'Why don't you kiss us?' that the temptation to comply would have been altogether irresistible, if there had not been about her, for all her childishness, and all her pretty mischievousness, clear evidence of other qualities in her character that would have made an impudence difficult to offer her. As she rose, with the rest, to greet the doctor, turning her head

quickly, and smiling as she held out her small, narrow hand, a charming dignity of girlish grace mixed with her rapid movements. And, as she put her hand into the doctor's, and, looking straight into his eyes, said, in her clear, musical voice, the common-place, 'How do you do, Dr. Gregg?' there was a sincerity in her regard, and in the tone of her greeting, which showed that, if she was artless and light-hearted, still she carried in her breast a soul intrinsically noble and sincere.

She was much better dressed than the widow, whose silk gown was a tiny bit shabby, and did not, in the exactest acceptation of the word, fit. Indeed, she was by far the best-dressed person in the room. The fact may as well be mentioned at once: that, when Lily Hardwick became

one-and-twenty, she would have a very pretty little fortune; and so having nice clothes from London was for her one of the simplest things in life.

They had all sat down again, and the doctor, alluding to the laughter he had overheard in the hall, begged that his arrival might not interrupt their amusements, and asked what was going on.

'Well—I was proposing a little problem —a sort of problem of the imagination,' said the Cambridge man. 'It was not original, but——' he paused.

'But I want to hear the end of it, please,' demanded the young heiress, with that species of authority which pretty girls are very apt to assume.

The Cambridge man went on.

'Well—I was saying, Dr. Gregg, that suppose there was an old Tartar in Tartary

—oh, you have heard all about it, I am sure—and suppose that, if that old Tartar died, you came into a very large fortune. And if you did something very simple; say, took this thimble'—he had a thimble under his hand, and was rolling it about on the table—'and put it down so'—suiting his action to his words, he put down the thimble on the table-cloth, as if he were extinguishing a candle with it—'and put that old Tartar out, you see, without anybody but yourself knowing anything about it: well—would you do it? I don't mind confessing that I—well; I am afraid I should be much tempted to put out that Tartar.'

And he put down the thimble again as if extinguishing a candle with it, and then, looking up quickly at one of the rector's daughters, asked,

'Well, Miss Wood; what do you say?'

'But that would be murder; just as if you killed him in any other way,' replied the girl.

'But I should not be found out, you know—and the fortune?'

'I should do it, I know,' said the other Miss Wood. 'I know it would be awfully wicked. But I'm sure I should not be able to resist the temptation.'

'We ought to pray to resist temptation,' remarked her sister, solemnly.

'I'd not do it; not for millions,' exclaimed the heiress, in her clear, ringing voice, without waiting to be asked.

'Not really, Miss Hardwick?' asked the Cambridge man.

'Certainly not!'

'You know he is awfully old. He can't last long anyway,' said the undergraduate

with a droll earnestness that made everyone laugh.

And, with his eyes fixed on Lily Hardwick, he began bringing the thimble down again.

'No, you shan't!' exclaimed the girl, stretching out her arm and snatching the thimble out of his hand.

The doctor, standing by the table, laughed.

The Cambridge man turned to the young widow.

'And you, Mrs. Gainsborough,' he said.

Leaning forward with her elbows on the table the widow had been watching all that was going forward, with singular attention. Her thin crimson lips were tightly pressed together, and not a shade of change passed over the expression of her sculpturesque

face, still as marble. But her strange, dark eyes went from one to another of the group before her as they spoke, and she seemed to watch for what each would say, and to con the expression of their faces with an inordinate interest. Every time, too, that the thimble slowly descended to extinguish the imaginary Tartar's existence, her eyes fixed themselves on it in a fascinated glance. Now that she was addressed she moved, almost as if unexpectedly awakened from a reverie.

'What do I say?' she repeated, and meditatively lifted her fingers to her lips. 'But—you see'—she looked at the Cambridge man—'the thing is impossible.'

'Unluckily,' admitted the undergraduate so seriously that they all laughed again.

'Yet,' he went on, 'do you know, I

once heard of something that comes very near it. If I may tell a little story?'

'Oh, do!' exclaimed the girls.

'Some years ago a scientific man, a friend of one of our tutors, was showing some chemical experiments to a number of school-girls. They were very intelligent girls, big girls, who had been attending chemical lectures at a first-class school. They asked him a number of questions, and got him to show them various elements and compounds that they had heard of but never seen; and, among other things, they asked to be shown some of the poisons. Some days afterwards, going to look on his shelves, he found that one of the most dangerous of his poisons had been stolen. And he believed one of the girls had taken it. If so, there is somewhere in the world a lady—for she is of course grown up by

this time—who could dispose of any of us as simply as I could of the Tartar—if Miss Hardwick would kindly give me back my thimble.'

The girls regarded each other with wide eyes.

'What was the poison?' asked Doctor Gregg.

'I believe it was aconite.'

'Is that very poisonous stuff, Doctor Gregg?' asked Lily Hardwick.

'Yes: a very small dose is fatal.'

'But can it not be easily detected, doctor?' enquired the widow. 'I have an idea that I have heard my father—he was a medical man, you know—say that it could.'

'Well, Mrs. Gainsborough,' replied the doctor, speaking gravely, and with much authority, 'in some cases this poison can be very easily detected; in fact——'

What more he might have said remained unfinished, for at this moment the rector was announced and entered the room. He had himself come to fetch his daughters home, because he had some news to bring the doctor. His wife had had a letter from a friend in town who had heard all about Lynhurst.

The late owner of the estate had bequeathed it to a Mr. Warrington. Mr. Warrington was a young man of some property, it seemed, and was shortly to be married. But Mr. Warrington had no wish to live in the country, and meant to sell the place.

So it still remained to be seen what would become of Lynhurst.

CHAPTER II.

But man proposes and—woman disposes.

Later this same evening the new proprietor of Lynhurst, who had recently been the object of so much curiosity in the Dorsetshire town, and his intended bride, sat talking together in the large drawing-room of a house in Welmore Street, Cavendish Square.

The *fiancée*—she was his cousin—was in a low seat a little distance from the fire, leaning back idly, and listening to what he was saying to her as he bent over her chair.

She was a good-looking girl—nothing more: a blonde, with a blonde's fine complexion and a graceful figure, and a classical face, a trifle passionless and reserved.

But he was a distinctly handsome man. Tallish, dark, about six-and-twenty, with a well-knit figure, athletic, and justly proportioned, with a strong, deeply-cut face that had aristocratic features and keen, penetrating eyes of the sort that attract those women who like to feel a little awe for what they admire. There was, however, nothing awe-inspiring in his appearance this evening, as he stood leaning over his betrothed with that easy, masculine grace which appears merely natural, but is never achieved except by perfectly well-bred gentlemen, chatting to her in a pleasant playful tone of his fine flexible

voice, and compelling her to be amused, even in spite of herself, in a manner that revealed him—whatever resoluteness or inflexibility he might have in reserve—as a good-natured fellow, with a strong vein of chivalry in his character, and a natural penchant for honest, perhaps almost blunt, straightforwardness.

The girl listened apathetically, dropping now and then a few words, and smiling softly when he said anything that amused her; for the rest employing herself merely with holding her fire-screen between her face and the flames, and remarking from time to time, 'I wonder where Essie can be.' To all appearance she was a little bored.

Presently the door opened softly, and a girl came into the room—the ex-

pected Essie. As her eyes fell on her sister and her lover by the fire, she stopped, and entertained herself for a minute or two with regarding them. There was a twinkle of amusement in her eyes.

She was prettier than her sister, though her features were less correct. She had all the appearance, too, of being a good deal brighter. Her light tall figure seemed created for rapid motion, and in her playful face, with its high cheek-bones, sharp nose, little roguish lips, and laughing eyes, stood a pretty plain confession of a waywardness, capable, when the humour took her, of pranks that at one-and-twenty, which was her age, may be serious.

All she said to herself, while watching the couple at the other end of the room,

was, 'Ah, Mr. Frank Warrington, make the most of it, my dear cousin!' Then, with the step of a cat, she crossed to them.

She had stood a full minute close to Frank Warrington's side before he or her sister saw her.

Then, laughing, he said,

'Ah, here you are at last. I've persuaded grandfather.'

'And he will let us go?' exclaimed the girl, with an eagerness in which appeared some seriousness.

'Yes; both you and Violet. I have told Violet.'

'And I have told Frank, Essie, that he had better breakfast with us to-morrow,' said Violet.

'Yes, do, cousin!' said Essie.

'Well, I will then.'

'And we will all drive to the station

together. And, Violet,' she continued, turning to her sister, 'as we shall have to breakfast to-morrow at nine instead of half-past ten we had better go to bed soon.'

'Well, then, I'll be off,' said Frank Warrington.

Violet rose and he put his arm round her and kissed her, and, having shaken hands with her sister, took his departure, saying,

'To-morrow at nine.'

Essie listened for his steps descending the stairs, and for the front door to close after him. Then she turned quickly to her sister.

'Oh! I say, Violet!' she exclaimed. Struck with a sudden thought, she went on, 'Violet, Frank has over-persuaded grandpapa for the instant, but nothing is more likely than that the horrid old

thing will change his mind again. And you know how he went on at dinner. Let us go to bed before he comes upstairs.'

'What for? What does it matter?' asked Violet, who had sat down again, leaning back idly in her chair.

'It seems to me it matters a good deal,' replied Essie. 'Suppose grandpapa should not let us go?'

But her sister would not move.

CHAPTER III.

However, when the next morning Warrington appeared for breakfast at a little after nine, the girls welcomed him with their things on, already dressed for their journey.

It was a bright October morning, calm and rather cold.

An hour later the northern express, standing by the long departure platform at Saint Pancras, was rapidly taking up the last of its passengers and their luggage. The minute hand on the giant clock-face at

the end of the imposing station had nearly reached the hour, and the clipping of tickets had commenced, and the closing of carriage-doors.

Warrington, standing on the edge of the platform, by the window of one of the first-class carriages, was talking to Violet, and from time to time looking over his shoulder at the bookstall.

'I don't see Essie,' he said.

'Oh, Essie is sure to come in time, Frank,' said Violet, reassuringly.

And, as she spoke, Essie slipped out of the booking-office, and, passing through the crowd on the platform, came over to where Warrington stood, coming up to him with her noiseless step just as the ticket-inspector reached the carriage, which he opened for her.

She sat down opposite her sister, by the

window. At the other end of the carriage was the lady's-maid, a discreet-looking *parisienne*, with an impenetrable and imperturbable French face.

Whilst the official clipped the tickets, Warrington for the moment stood back from the window. Then, resuming his place, he said, speaking to both the girls,

'I shall tell grandfather that I saw you safely off, and that you had a compartment to yourselves. The guard has promised me not to put anyone in at Kentish Town, and the train does not stop afterwards until you reach Kettering, so you will have the carriage to yourselves all the way. Mrs. Eversfield will be sure to meet you on the Kettering platform, and you have Félicité with you. So I think I may tell grandfather not to fidget,

seeing that you are about as perfectly safe as it is possible to be.'

'Always supposing that there is not a railway accident, you know,' said Essie.

'Heaven forbid it!' remarked her sister, with greater solemnity than the unlikely suggestion demanded.

'At any rate,' ran on Essie, 'if anything does happen to us, it will be all cousin Frank's fault, won't it, Frank? Because if it had not been for your persuading him, and promising to see us off, grandpapa would never have let us go. If anything goes wrong it will be your doing, won't it?'

'We will hope that nothing will go wrong,' said Warrington, easily.

'No, but seriously, Frank,' returned Essie, in another tone, 'we are awfully obliged to you for having persuaded

grandpapa, and having managed it all for us ; for we should never have done it without you. Grandpapa always gets cross and impatient, when we try to bring him to any reason.'

Whilst she spoke Violet Chesterfield looked through the side window, an askance look at Frank Warrington, a very strange look. When her sister had done speaking, she added her thanks languidly, a sort of echo only of what the other had said, and asked,

'Is it not almost time for the train to start?'

'In about two minutes.' Warrington looked up and down the train, and then went on, 'I shall come to meet you this evening.'

'Thanks,' said Violet, in the same cold tone.

A shadow crossed the man's handsome face, a shadow of pain, but a momentary one only. It was not difficult to understand that shadow. The case between him and the girl was only too plain. The old story, '*En amour il y a toujours un qui aime et un qui se laisse aimer.*' And the love was on his side, a man's blunt love, with its unselfish tenderness. On her side existed, perhaps, some admiration for a handsome, accomplished man, certainly nothing more; and a cruel indifference to his seeing it. Nothing breathes more pitiless than a woman who is loved by a man whom she does not love. All the histories of the worst of tyrants and inquisitors, and of the cruellest tortures to which their victims have been subjected, offer no example of a heartlessness so bitter as that with which a woman will, without hesita-

tion, wound the gentlest feelings of a lover for whom she has no affection.

'Oh, Frank, do you know,' recommenced Essie, 'we were so awfully amused at something we heard the other night at Mrs. Phillips's. I *must* tell you about it. It tickled our fancy so enormously. It was such an *awfully* funny story, and your coming to see us off has made me think of it. I hope I shall have time to tell you before the train starts. Mrs. Phillips has a niece, or a cousin, or something, I really forget what exactly. And she—I mean the cousin—lived with her great-aunt, or her great-uncle, or her great something. And she was engaged to a man for whom she did not care a bit—you understand.'

Frank Warrington nodded assent. From her corner Violet Chesterfield was regarding her sister with a certain degree of

curiosity. Apparently this story was new to her.

'Well,' went on Essie, 'this girl was engaged to this man, a Mr.—really I forget his name—we will say Smith. And she could not for the life of her discover how she was to escape from having to marry him. I can't tell you all about that. It would take too long. Anyhow the time slipped by, and at last the wedding-day was fixed, and the girl grew positively desperate, when, all of a sudden, she hit upon a plan. It really was so awfully funny I can't help laughing when I think of it.'

And she began to laugh.

'Are you crazy, Essie?' interrupted Violet, in a low cold voice, from her corner.

'Why? Why should I not tell Frank?'

demanded Essie. 'The story is no secret.'

'I am sure Frank does not want to hear it. Don't listen, Frank.'

'No. But it is a very funny story,' insisted Essie. 'Now, Frank, listen. This girl managed to get an invitation from her godmother to come and pay her a visit before her wedding. The godmother had been always awfully kind to her; like Violet's godmother, Mrs. Eversfield, you know. I don't know where the godmother lived. But it was near Dover. The girl's friends refused to let her go. So she appealed to Smith to help her, and he agreed. She got away from home on the sly, and the amorous Smith met her, and accompanied her to Victoria Station, and put her into the Dover train and promised to come and meet her again in the evening. You understand?'

'Yes.'

'Well, the train started all right. And —that is the end of the story.'

'How so?' asked Warrington.

'Why—can't you see?'

'She never came back?'

'*Never*,' said Essie, with a shake of her pretty head, and a look of the drollest solemnity. 'But, don't you see, the joke of it was that it was Smith that had assisted her to escape from himself.'

The minute hand of the train had reached the hour. At St. Pancras the trains start with the greatest punctuality, and without the least fuss, and at the same instant a guard's low whistle sounded down the platform, and the train began to move.

Frank Warrington walked a few paces by the side of the train, shaking hands

with the girls, wishing them '*Bon voyage*,' and adding,

'Telegraph from Kettering.'

The speed quickening slightly, he was just about to turn away from the train when Violet suddenly leaned forward and looked in his face.

'*Adieu*,' she said, in a tone that had a ring of strange significance.

And a moment afterwards, he being left by that time some three or four yards behind, Essie put her head out of the window.

'Good-bye — Mr. Smith,' she said, laughing.

Then she drew in her head, and the window-sash went up with a little jerk.

CHAPTER IV.

The train rolled away, winding round the curve out of the station. Frank Warrington stood looking after it. Soon the end of the last carriage disappeared, and there was no more to be seen: only the porters with their trucks, and other railway servants, and the news-boys, and the people who had come to see their friends off, moving away.

Warrington turned, and took six slow steps towards the way out of the station. Then he stopped, and, facing about, looked

in the direction of the train that had vanished.

His mind misgave him. Incredible as the thing was, he could not shake off a haunting misgiving that his cousin Essie had been describing to him an impudent hoax of which he was himself at this very moment the victim.

'But this is impossible!' he said to himself.

Yet he could not make up his mind to leave the station. Lighting a cigar, he began walking up and down the long platform. And he went to look at the time-table. The train was due at Kettering at 11.28 a.m. He might have remembered that.

The train did not stop except at Kentish Town between London and Kettering. It would be very easy to telegraph to

Kettering. Only, if really bent on mischief, the girls might easily go on beyond Kettering.

The train stopped next at Sheffield, or they might change at Kettering for Nottingham. Only then, Mrs. Eversfield would see them. Well, it would be easy enough to telegraph to all these points: "Two young ladies, sisters—tall, fair, *et cètera*, dressed—that would be rather more difficult to describe—accompanied by a French maid—should alight at Kettering, and be met by a Mrs. Eversfield—suspected of intention of escaping from their guardian. Have train watched. Arrest ladies, if they pass Kettering.' Thus Warrington to himself, whilst consulting the time-table. One thing he knew for certain, Mrs. Eversfield would not assist the girls in any mischief. If they alighted at Kettering, and

were met by her, all was well. In that case, he would only have to pay for the telegrams, and no one need ever know anything about the matter.

He did telegraph to Kentish Town, to know if by any chance the girls had commenced operations at once, by leaving the train there. Answer in the negative.

With a jerk, Frank Warrington brought his cane up under his arm, and, swinging round on his heel, walked away from the telegraph-office, and out of the station.

He was ashamed of himself. He appeared to be forgetting that he was a gentleman and the girls ladies. Ladies and gentlemen do not do things of this kind. A girl who respects herself does not jilt a man without a word of explanation a month before her wedding-day. Young ladies do not go on their travels

with no more luggage than a lady's-maid and a hand-bag. Well-bred girls have more regard for their own reputations than to vanish in the manner related in the history of Mr. Smith. The story of Mr. Smith was simply a story, and probably not true; it seemed doubtful whether any man could be such an ass as Smith—though some great fool might, perhaps.

And resolving to banish from his thoughts a suspicion which he was ashamed ever to have entertained, he hailed a hansom, and, jumping into it, named to the driver his grandfather's house in Welmore Street.

'Is General Chesterfield down?' he asked of the boy in buttons who opened the door.

'At breakfast, sir.'

Laying down his hat and stick on the

hall-table, Warrington crossed to the dining-room.

Seated at one end of the table, with his back to a roaring fire, was an old man, very stout, and perfectly bald, with a large and very rubicund face. He was dressed in a hideous flowered dressing-gown, and, with a large table-napkin tucked under his double or treble chin, was commencing with a plate of julienne soup what was evidently, from the number of things on the table, to be a very long and elaborate *déjeûner*.

'Good-morning, grandfather; how are you this morning?' said Warrington.

'I've got the indigestion,' growled the old man, crossly. 'What's the time?' he asked in the same tone, as Warrington drew a chair to the side of the table.

'About half-past ten.'

'And those jades of girls not down yet. They treat me with no more respect than a sweep. Upon my soul, I'll not put up with it!—I'll *not* put up with it.'

'Down! They had breakfast at nine,' said Warrington, sitting down. 'I breakfasted with them. You forget. I have just come back from seeing them off from the station.'

'Station! What station?' demanded the old man, holding a spoonful of soup in front of his mouth.

'From St. Pancras.'

'What do they want to go to St. Pancras for?'

'Gone down to Kettering, you know, to see Mrs. Eversfield.'

'I said they should not go down to Kettering,' exclaimed the general, passionately, turning half round in his chair to

face his grandson. And he gave the table a great thump with his fist.

'But, you know, last night you gave them leave to go,' remarked Warrington, altogether undisturbed at the old man's temper.

'I said they should *not* go. I will not have them go to see Mrs. Eversfield; and they shall not go,' replied the old man, still more angrily. 'I'll not have them running about the country like a pair of milliners.'

'But, you see, as you gave them leave, they are gone.'

'I don't care. They shall *not* go,' thundered the general. 'I say they shall *not* go.'

But, bringing down his fist once more to emphasize his determination, the old fellow, whose sight was not so good as it

had been, this time just caught his knuckles on the edge of his soup-plate, which thereupon flew spinning into the air, showering its contents all over himself.

'Ugh!' he exclaimed, with disgust, pushing back his chair and holding out his hands as he watched the soup dripping down on the carpet. 'Here, get me a napkin; get me something. Here, James! Ugh!'

The man-servant came to his assistance, the soup was wiped off the carpet, a clean table-napkin provided, and another plate of soup. Meanwhile, Warrington explained how he had seen the two girls and their maid safely off from St. Pancras in a compartment which they would have to themselves all the way, the general growling all the time, and asserting the wilful disobedience of the girls, and declining to hear

anything Warrington wished to say in explanation.

'Very well,' he concluded at last, passionately, 'very well. I wash my hands of the whole affair. I said that the girls should not go. I told them so last night after you left. You choose to assist them to disobey me. I have nothing to do with it. If anything happens, it is all your fault. You understand, sir, all your fault. Not mine. And if you wish your wife and her sister to conduct themselves like milliners—very good. Only not so long as they are in my house, please. You have assisted them to disobey me; and I wash my hands of the whole affair.'

And he pushed his plate from him and poured himself out a glass of Chablis.

Cod "*à la Hollandaise*" succeeded the julienne, and the painful subject of the

Misses Chesterfield's conduct was dropped. The old man was still cross, and exceedingly huffy, but by degrees his breakfast and his grandson coaxed him into a better temper, and by one o'clock grandfather and grandson were getting on together capitally. The old man had finished his breakfast, and was sipping a cup of strong coffee and smoking a cigar in which Warrington had joined him, standing leaning against the chimney-piece.

A servant came in with a telegram for the general.

'Now, then, what's this?' exclaimed the old man, pettishly; 'why do you bring me telegrams directly after my meals? Eh? Haven't I trouble enough to digest my food, without having my stomach loaded with telegrams. Eh? What's it about? Take it away.'

Warrington stepped forward.

'I told the girls to telegraph as soon as they reached Kettering,' he said, quietly. 'No doubt it is from them.'

'Very well,' said his grandfather, not too pleasantly. 'Then you had better look at it.'

Warrington took the telegram from the servant, and, still leaning against the chimney-piece, tore it open.

He turned as pale as ashes.

The telegram was not from the girls but from Mrs. Eversfield.

'*Misses Chesterfield not come by eleven twenty-eight. Am I to expect them by a later train, or are their plans changed? I wait at station for reply.*'

Warrington felt the floor giving way under his feet.

Sitting up in his deep arm-chair, the

general was sipping his coffee. Putting down his cup he leaned back again, and replacing his cigar between his lips, puffed a slow cloud of smoke.

'I am afraid there is something wrong,' said Warrington, in a cold, even tone, mastering himself by a strong effort. 'Mrs. Eversfield telegraphs that the girls have not arrived at Kettering.'

'Where are they gone, then?'

'I don't understand it,' answered Warrington, in the same quiet way. 'The train did not stop between London and Kettering, and they must have arrived there. Only it seems that there is some mistake.—I'll telegraph to Mrs. Eversfield at once,' he concluded, proceeding to leave the room.

In his own mind he had no doubt at all about what had happened. This was

the veritable history of the redoubtable Mr. Smith.

He hastily put on his coat in the hall, and snatched up his hat and stick, telling the telegraph boy that he need not wait. Going out he hailed the first cab he saw, and, promising the cabman a handsome fare, bade him drive for his life to St. Pancras.

For the moment he did not know what he felt most, indignation, anger, mortification, or sheer stupefaction: mortification at the evidently irretrievable loss of his cousin, to whom he was sincerely attached; indignation at the trick that had been played him; anger with his cousin for what she had done, and with himself for proving so easily her dupe; or stupefaction at the sudden occurrence of an incident, so far as he could perceive, utterly

unprepared, and perfectly unaccountable.

He already had a theory. The girls had deliberately gone beyond Kettering. Their intention was to leave the train at some station further down the railway. There, some accomplice would be waiting to meet them, some man, or men; all this had not been devised without the assistance of men. Who the men might be was more difficult to conjecture. The girls had an uncle, their mother's brother, and they liked their uncle better than their grandfather. But their uncle was abroad. Other relatives they had none. Presumably then the men on whose assistance they were relying belonged to the indefinite class most simply described as 'lovers,' and these gentlemen were probably to be rewarded with the hands and hearts of the young ladies.

'Only, by Jove, not if I can help it,'

vowed Warrington, in the corner of his cab.

Another point occurred to him. The girls, if they were well advised, would not go very far beyond Kettering. They could hardly have left out of their calculations that as soon as they were missed they would be pursued by the telegraph. And they would be missed as soon as they did not appear at Kettering. Their device would evidently be to quit the train at the next station after Kettering in the hope of getting away before there had been time for Mrs. Eversfield to telegraph to the grandfather, and for their grandfather to telegraph down the railway to stop them.

The next place at which the express stopped after Kettering was Sheffield. Was that their destination? or had they gone to Nottingham?

'I think I have them. They have been mistaken in their Mr. Smith,' quoth Warrington to himself.

The cab drew up with a jerk. Tossing the driver half-a-crown, Warrington rushed to the telegraph office.

He telegraphed to Sheffield and to Nottingham, and, at the suggestion of the official, to Chesterfield, where the train might have been stopped by signal.

'*Two young ladies, sisters, tall, fair, fashionably dressed, accompanied by a French lady's-maid, have tickets for Kettering, but have gone beyond that station, believed to be attempting to escape from their guardian, perhaps have gone further, please search train and make inquiries.*'

An answer came back from Nottingham. No such ladies had alighted there. Nor at Chesterfield where the train had stopped.

Warrington went out of the telegraph office, and took a turn on the platform, considerably lighter of heart.

'You ought to have left the train before this, young ladies,' he remarked, in imagination addressing the fugitives. 'I am afraid that you have not been very well advised. We shall have you now at Sheffield.'

He had telegraphed to Mrs. Eversfield making some sort of excuse.

Now he was waiting for the train to reach Sheffield.

When it was due there he returned to the telegraph office.

Telegram from Sheffield: '*No such ladies in the train.*'

'But this is impossible,' exclaimed Warrington. 'I myself saw them leave this station in the train, and if they did not

alight at Kentish Town, nor at Kettering, they must have been in the train when it reached Sheffield.'

The telegraph clerk asserted that 'He couldn't say,' with the curtness peculiar to his species.

It appeared to Warrington that it was very easy to say that people who had not left a train must still be in it. The adventure began to resemble magic. If Félicité had had anything bigger than a hand-bag with her he would have begun to believe in disguises.

Another telegram from Sheffield.

'*Guard of express says that two young ladies similar to those described, and accompanied by a lady's-maid, alighted at Bedford. One of the ladies was ill, and the train was stopped by signal from the carriage as it was running into Bedford station. Train stopped*

at Bedford only for a minute. Telegraph to Bedford.'

One of the girls taken ill! This was a new aspect of the matter.

And of course Warrington telegraphed to Bedford.

Answer from Bedford: '*The Scotch express stopped here by signal given by passengers. Two young ladies alighted and a maid with them. They had tickets for Nottingham.*'

'How on earth did they come to have tickets for Nottingham?' wondered Warrington. Were these his cousins? His head began to turn on his shoulders.

Telegram to Bedford for further particulars, and to inquire what had become of the young ladies and their maid.

Reply: '*One of the young ladies was indisposed, and her sister stopped the train just*

as it was coming into Bedford. Young ladies and maid left the station shortly after their arrival. Nothing is known of where they went afterwards.'

A suspicion of the truth rose before Frank Warrington. There was a train in the station shortly to start for Bedford, and he went down by it. He found his suspicion correct. The young ladies who had stopped the express were the Misses Chesterfield. Violet had found herself suddenly indisposed, and Essie had stopped the train. The waiting-room attendant was inclined to think that the young lady had nothing very serious the matter with her. She refused to take anything that was suggested, and, after about ten minutes, said she would walk up and down the platform, believing that the air would do her good. After that the attendant saw

and heard no more of them until the telegram arrived.

It was five o'clock by this time, and dark. The girls had had time to go almost anywhere, and further inquiries about them were merely ridiculous. Warrington had nothing left to do but to return to town to inform the general that his granddaughters had, beyond a doubt, run away, and to see how the old man would like it.

For his own private satisfaction, he had the further knowledge that he had played the part of Mr. Smith to perfection.

CHAPTER V.

On reaching town, Frank Warrington drove straight to General Chesterfield's. He was resolved at once to acquaint the general with the whole truth. To put off facing inevitable mortifications is the foible of those weak characters that seek to gain time with some vague hope of gaining, with time, courage; and weakness was not among Frank Warrington's faults.

When he reached Welmore Street, the general was just going to dine. Nothing could have been more unfortunate, and

Warrington knew it. If he could have reached the general's only a quarter-of-an-hour earlier, the case would not have been so utterly desperate. Now the general would be kept waiting for his dinner; he must hear what Warrington had to say. Then the dinner would be spoiled; and the general would be furious: and the passion he would put himself into would entirely upset his digestion:—and, when once the general's digestion was upset, his self-control became a minus quantity, after which everything was possible, not excluding apoplexy. However, there was nothing for it but to break the fatal news.

Indeed, the general left him no choice. As Warrington came in, the old man was descending the stairs, and, seeing his grandson, at once demanded,

'Eh, Frank, is that you? But where—where are the girls?'

Instead of directly answering the question, Warrington asked,

'Grandfather, can I speak to you for a few minutes in private?'

'Speak to me for a few minutes in private: now: just before dinner? No—certainly not, sir! *Where* are those two girls?'

Receiving no answer, he ran on, angrily, with an oath,

'Not come in yet! Eh? Well, then, I'll not have them out of the house at this time of night. I'll not have it, sir! I tell you, I'll not have it!'

'It is of no use for you to put yourself into a passion, grandfather,' remarked Warrington, tolerably coolly. 'I'd rather tell you in private, if you could spare a couple of minutes.'

'But—I'll not spare a couple of minutes.'

'Well, then, I suppose I must tell you here,' said Warrington. (They had come into the dining-room, where the men-servants were waiting by the sideboard.) '*The girls have bolted.*'

'What!' demanded the general, stopping suddenly, and facing his grandson.

'The girls have bolted,' repeated Warrington.

Going to the hearth, he turned his back to the fire, and stood stroking his moustache, and looking at the general.

For a few minutes the general looked dumbfounded, only trembling, and turning crimson with passion. Then he stammered out, in a choking voice,

'What! what! gone away! the hussies! gone: it's—it's—not true!'

'Perfectly true, I assure you,' answered Warrington, with very tolerable composure. 'The girls have bolted. I saw them into the train at St. Pancras this morning, and got them and their maid their tickets. Three tickets for Kettering. They did not go to Kettering. When they reached Bedford they signalled to the guard to stop the train. Violet said that she was ill, and they were left upon the Bedford platform. They went to the ladies' waiting-room, and remained there a few minutes. After that they must have left the station, for nobody knows any more about them. I have been down to Bedford to make inquiries, and can ascertain nothing.'

The serving-men standing by the sideboard looked at each other.

'Here, come with me,' said the general.

He led the way to the library, Warrington following him. As soon as the door was closed behind him the general began,

'What the devil, sir, do you mean by telling me a story like this before the servants? And listen, sir. I don't believe a word of it. And I *won't* believe a word of it. Where are these hussies gone?'

Warrington related his history again, with further particulars. And then he told it a third time; the general working himself up into a terrible passion meanwhile, and vowing that he would not believe a word. Howbeit, in time the facts became too strong for him, and then began the real scene.

First the general swore. And then, falling into such a rage that he could scarcely speak, he stammered out, in broken sentences, amidst many very bad

words, that the girls were a pair of disreputable hussies, and something else a great deal worse, and that they should never enter his house again—that he would disinherit them, and would alter his will that very evening—that Warrington was every whit as bad as the girls, and an impudent, conceited donkey into the bargain—that it was Warrington's fault and nobody's else that the girls had finally disgraced themselves; that he, the general, did not care a fig what became of any of them—and that he was going to have his dinner.

All that might have been said in a very few minutes. But the old gentleman repeated each particular so many times, and employed so many powerful adjectives and adverbs to emphasize all he said, and stammered so much, that it was past nine o'clock before he and his grandson parted,

not very amicably, but less unpleasantly than might have been expected. After all, men understand one another, and make allowances.

Going to the dining-room, the general even said to himself,

'I'm afraid the poor boy is put out about the loss of his sweetheart—the hussy. And confound the young coxcomb! Helping the hussies to disobey me! It's all his doing, confound him! But I'm afraid the boy is put out about the loss of his sweetheart.'

Of course the dinner was spoiled. That was a small matter compared with the flight of the girls, but hardly so in the eyes of the general. Anyhow, this last final provocation proved too much for the poor old fellow's already over-heated brain. After pushing away a third dish with a

savage 'Take it away, James. Take it away. It's not fit to give to a dog,' he got up from the table, vowing he had no appetite. For an hour or two he fretted about the place, sending for the servants, and wanting to know why Warrington had left, scolding in all sorts of unreasonable ways, and grumbling about not being able to eat his dinner. Then he went to bed. The next morning he was complaining of rheumatism in his left shoulder, and looking as yellow as a guinea, and unable to eat his breakfast.

CHAPTER VI.

About the same time that Warrington left Bedford, a big, broad-shouldered man between fifty and fifty-five years of age, with his large hands thrust into the side pockets of his dark pea-jacket, sauntered into the station at Hunstanton. He was a strongly built man, good-looking for his years, with a bright clear eye, and a finely-moulded face, expressive in a high degree of both energy and good-nature, browned with exposure to the sun and wind, where it was not covered by his heavy moustache

and enormous beard that grew high on his cheeks and flowed down on his broad breast. In his air there was something of the man accustomed to command, and something of the easy bearing of a sailor.

'When will the train be in from Lynn?' he asked of the station-master, who was standing on the platform.

'Six-seventeen, sir.'

'It will be late to-night.'

'No, sir.'

'Thanks.'

The speaker turned away, and, strolling along the platform, took from his pocket a briar pipe and a pouch of tobacco. He filled his pipe slowly, and then, having lighted it, put his hands again into his pockets, and, walking up and down the end of the platform, smoked his pipe in a leisurely fashion.

When the train was signalled, he had just finished. Knocking out the ashes against a lamp-post, he put away his pipe, and putting his hands again into his pockets, sauntered to the front of the platform with the same leisurely ease that characterised all his movements.

The train rolled in. As it passed, he rapidly scanned the windows of the carriages, and then a smile lighted his face.

At one of the windows were two girls looking out eagerly: Violet and Essie Chesterfield.

'There is Uncle Tony,' cried Essie at the same instant, as he turned and came towards them.

A minute later the girls were both on the platform, holding their uncle by his arms, with their little hands on his great shoulders.

'Dear old Uncle Tony!'

'So you got away, then?' remarked their uncle, smiling.

'Oh, we had such fun!' replied Essie. 'Cousin Frank came to see us off; really he did. Last night grandpapa said we should not go, and we were in the most awful fright. But Frank took our part, and at last grandpapa consented. After Frank had gone, grandpapa changed his mind again, and said we should not go after all. But grandpapa never comes down to breakfast till nearly eleven, and so this morning we had an early breakfast. And we told Frank—he came to breakfast with us—nothing about grandpapa having changed his mind. So he took us to the station, and, only fancy, Uncle Tony! he got us our tickets, and *everything!* I could have laughed! And he told us we were

to be sure to telegraph when we got to Kettering. And he said he would come to meet us at St. Pancras in the evening. And, do you know, just before we started, we told him a story about an imaginary Mr. Smith, who was going to be married to a girl who did not care for him, and how the girl got him to see her off by the train, and never came back; just what we were doing, you know. And he never took it in, not a bit. Then all the rest we did just as you told us. Violet pretended that she was ill, and we stopped the train at Bedford. I am sure'—here Miss Essie looked very droll—'that the woman in the ladies' waiting-room at Bedford saw that we were humbugging. However, we got away from her as fast as we could. Then we took the train to Cambridge. And, do you know, we had such an awfully

jolly luncheon at Cambridge, we were so hungry! And from Cambridge we came straight on here, and here we are, you see, safe and sound.'

'I see,' said Uncle Tony. 'I'm afraid it's all very wrong, you know. You've no luggage, I imagine, and we may just as well be going.' He turned and spoke to the lady's-maid, who was standing a little off. 'And how are you, Félicité, quite well?'

'Quite well, thank you, sir,' answered Félicité, with a French accent; 'and very glad to get away from the General Chesterfield's house, sir.'

'Come along, then,' said Uncle Tony to the girls. 'The trunk you sent down from town came last night, and was taken on board this afternoon; so we have nothing to wait for.'

When they were in the cab, he asked,

'And the general, how did you leave him?'

'The horrid old thing!' exclaimed Essie. 'He is killing himself with eating. Fancy! the doctor has told him five times within the last two months that, if he goes on stuffing himself as he does, he will die of it. And yet he eats enough at any meal for three.'

'You have been very unhappy with your grandfather?'

'He never said a kind word to us, not once, all the time we were with him,' said Violet, passionately. 'We have been scolded at, called names, and sworn at for two years.'

'Do you mean that he really swore at you?'

'Rather!' said Essie.

'The general's life has been a very rough one,' observed Uncle Tony, apologetically; 'but in his time he was a fine officer. And your *fiancé*, my dear?' he continued, turning to Violet.

'Oh, I suppose he is all right,' replied Violet Chesterfield, indifferently. 'You know, he is not at all a bad sort of fellow, uncle. In a way I like him, only——'

'But you must not be changing your mind, my dear. It is too late to begin liking him now.'

'You quite misunderstand me,' answered Violet Chesterfield, coldly.

'All right, niece.'

'I mean, uncle,' explained Violet, more confidentially, 'that I could like Frank well enough as my cousin—but that I could never wish to marry him. I should never have dreamed of such a thing, I can

assure you, only we were both of us so utterly wretched with grandpapa. You can't imagine what we have endured. Nothing but scold, scold, scold, nag, nag, nag, all day long, to say nothing of his being in a perfect fury with us at least twice a week; and almost mad whenever we said we wished that we could live with you. We have been nearly beside ourselves, and there seemed no way out of it, except getting married. And so, when Frank came home from abroad, and I saw that grandpapa wanted me to marry him, I accepted him. I know it was wrong; but —oh, well, I don't want to make excuses, I know it was wrong.'

'Certainly,' admitted Uncle Tony.

'Afterwards, you know, when it came to marrying, I began quite to hate him, though I knew he was not a bad sort of

fellow. Still, when I began to see what it all meant, that I was throwing myself away for good and all, and should have ever after to turn round and round in one fatal circle of Frank, Frank, Frank, nothing but Frank—never to live anywhere except with Frank, never to go anywhere except with Frank, never to love anyone but Frank, never have anyone to think about but Frank, never any home but Frank's home, and never any future but Frank's future, I began to think that I should go mad. And if you had not come to our assistance I should have done something desperate, I know, something awfully wrong, I daresay. However, thank goodness, it's all over now, like a bad dream: and I don't know that I am not a little bit sorry for Cousin Frank. He has been rather badly used. Still, I could not

help it. I could not have married him.'

'I don't think, you know, that you need be afraid of his wanting you to do so after this,' said Tony Gainsborough, drily.

'Violet,' put in Essie, 'has been in such an awful fright all day lest we should be telegraphed after, and caught. I could not help laughing when I thought of it. It would have been such an awful climax.'

'Ah, you were not going to be married next month,' remarked Violet.

'Well, I think you may consider yourselves safe now,' said the uncle; 'unless we find a policeman with a telegram waiting for us on the pier.'

'You wouldn't send us back, uncle?' exclaimed Essie.

'Well, perhaps not,' admitted Uncle Tony.

But there was no policeman on the pier.

Only a four-oar cutter, waiting, and a man with a lantern.

The girls were soon in the boat.

'Where is the yacht, Uncle Tony?' said Violet.

'Lying off, about a mile and a half out.'

He sat down in the stern and took the yoke-lines; the girls were on his right and left.

'All ready?' he asked.

'No, uncle, wait a minute,' said Essie.

'What is it?'

'Ask the man to hold the light near. I am going to write a line to grandpapa. May I? It will put a stop to his hunting after us all over the country, you know.'

'All right—as you please.'

Essie drew a little pocket-book from her pocket, and, having opened it on her knees,

unfastened a pencil from her watch-chain. The man with the light bent down, holding the lantern at her shoulder. The imperfect light fitfully illumined the boat, and the calm water round it, the little group in the stern-sheets, the sailors in their loose shirts resting on their oars, and the iron piles of the pier above them. Whilst the waves sobbed and splashed against the side of the boat, Essie wrote,

'DEAR GRANDPAPA,

'I write this on my knees in Uncle Tony Gainsborough's cutter, as we are waiting under the lee of the pier at Hunstanton before putting off to his yacht.

'Violet was quite unable to face marriage with Cousin Frank. She is very sorry for it, and you can tell him so; but she does

not care a bit for him, and would never have promised to marry him if we had not wanted so dreadfully to get away from No 19, Welmore Street, where we were both so miserable, as you must know. However, Uncle Tony has promised us that neither of us shall ever come back to live with you —so we will let bygones be bygones, and say no more about how wretched you have made us every day for two whole long years.

'We have left a lot of things behind us. You can do just what you like with them, and we have paid all our bills.

'It will be of no use for either you or Cousin Frank to hunt after us. But, as you might feel inclined to do so, I am unable to tell you anything about our plans.

'Violet and I hope that you will think

of what Dr. Beauchamp told you, and leave off over-eating yourself.—Your affectionate and dutiful grand-daughter,

'ESSIE CHESTERFIELD.'

She had brought with her an envelope directed to General Chesterfield, and she slipped the paper into it. Tony Gainsborough passed it over to the man who held the lantern, giving him a shilling and telling him to post it. Then he gave the word,

'Give way.'

And the cutter left the jetty, cleaving her way, through the calm, gently rippling water, to where the lights of the steam-yacht shone out at sea.

CHAPTER VII.

From his grandfather's house, Warrington went to his own chambers. It was a relief, after a day of excitements and fatigues of so unpleasant a kind, to find himself, once more, at last at home, and he put the latch-key into the lock of his own door with a feeling of coming into port, after shipwreck, it is true, but, still coming into port.

He passed through the small lobby, and entered the dining-room.

A bright fire blazed on the hearth, and a

lamp on the table shed a pleasant light around the comfortable, rather tastefully furnished room. Folding-doors leading into the next room were open, and there the clicking of some machine at work was audible.

A man sitting at a little table was busily at work with a Remington type-writer. As Frank Warrington approached him, he spoke, without looking up.

'Why, Frank, where have you been all day?'

'Where, indeed? You may well ask, my dear Eustace,' replied Warrington, throwing himself into a big arm-chair.

The other rose, and came towards him.

He was Frank Warrington's brother, and very like him; nearly of the same height, but fairer and much more slightly built, and with more delicate features:

features that presented less of actual masculine handsomeness, but more of sculpturesque refinement; a finer, more spiritual type—if the term may pass—something almost feminine, that was enhanced by the pensive expression of a face in which, though it had a light of its own, there was a great blank: for the eyes were closed. Eustace Warrington was blind.

'Why, what has happened?' he asked, sitting down in the chair opposite his brother with that perfect ease of the blind which suggests the idea of sight being a rather superfluous accomplishment.

'In the first place,' replied Frank Warrington, 'it is all over between me and Violet.'

'Finally?'

'Finally, Eustace,' answered Warrington, with emphasis.

'And how so?' asked the blind man, very quietly.

'The girls have bolted from grandfather.'

'Where are they gone?'

'That we don't know.'

Eustace Warrington leaned forward and seemed to think.

'Grandfather has treated them very badly,' he said, meditatively, 'and they have been very unhappy with him.' Then, raising himself, he said: 'Where and how did all this happen?'

Warrington related the history of the day, and made no scruple about expressing his opinion of the Misses Chesterfield's behaviour.

Talking is intoxicating. A man may think much, and feel deeply; but, whilst he only thinks and feels within himself, it is singular how little his passions are

moved, either by his feelings or by his speculations. It is when he proceeds to speak, to give his soul utterance in the hearing of other men, that he is carried away. Telling his brother what had occurred, Warrington became very soon bitter beyond measure. And, still, harsh as the things were that he said, none of his language seemed to himself sufficiently to express the savage anger against his cousin, and the profound indignation at the way he had been used, that was seething within him.

Eustace heard him attentively, seldom interrupting him. Only, as his brother's language became more passionate, he repeated what he had said before, very quietly.

'The girls have been very unhappy with grandfather, much more so than

you have imagined. Of course you did not see it. You people who see are always blind to that sort of thing. But I assure you those two girls have been miserable.'

'However grandfather treated them, he treated them better than they deserved, and the event has proved it,' returned Warrington.

At the end came the real question, 'What was to be done?'

There was no hope of the affair being quietly hushed up. Arrangements for a wedding had gone too far, and the general's servants knew what had happened. And the general himself would not be reticent. As soon as he had got over his first twenty-four hours of rage, the old fellow would cast about him for an explanation of what had occurred that would make the case

look best for himself. Both his grandsons knew that. No doubt all the blame would be laid upon Warrington. Rather than marry him, Violet Chesterfield had bolted, and made her sister go with her. And then the assistance that Warrington had lent his betrothed to get away from him: his persuading the general, and seeing his cousins off, and all the rest would make a magnificent story, which the general would know only too well how to relate to his friend Colonel Nysson, and to old Tyler of the War Office, and little Jack Gratton of the Blues. And two hours after that the thing would be all over London.

Only Warrington trusted that he would be before then out of the way of hearing about it. Only the question was, where should he go?

'*La nuit porte conseil*,' said Eustace. 'Let us leave it till to-morrow. So far as I can see, you have had nothing to eat since breakfast. We will have supper now. Whilst it is being brought up, I'll finish my letters, and we will leave the discussion of our plans until to-morrow.'

His advice was good. It is not until after a night's rest that a man learns, in a case like this, justly to appreciate his new situation. On waking, Warrington seemed to himself hardly, on the previous day, to have understood what had taken place, and only now to comprehend that he had lost the girl he had hoped to marry, and all that that implied; the singularly ridiculous figure he himself was likely to cut when the story got abroad; and many other things, unhappily none of them pleasant.

As for the young lady—well, he was well rid of her, and would be a fool if he regretted her. The pretty little escapade of running away from her grandfather was enough of itself to cure any man of judgment from wishing to have Miss Violet Chesterfield for his wife. And unhappily, in addition to that, Frank Warrington could, with truth, lay to her charge other delinquencies still more serious.

When they were first engaged, his cousin had been cold and unresponsive. When a date for the marriage came to be talked about, she only, after considerable delay, consented, with evident reluctance, to name the wedding-day. But a week or so later a gradual change came over her. The marked coolness of her manner disappeared. When Warrington came to see her she received him with smiles, and showed herself

amiable and responsive, almost affectionate. That, then, Warrington inferred, was the date when she first laid her plans to escape from him, and began to see her way to carrying them into execution. If so, it was not difficult to find ugly words for the disingenuousness of a girl who began to be indulgent to her lover as soon as she saw her way to deceiving him.

And these considerations rendered more easy the bitterness with which Frank Warrington proceeded next to judge the finishing stroke of his faithless mistress's deceit, and the malice that had found amusement in making him an accomplice in his own humiliation.

It did not occur to him to remember that it was not Violet but her sister who had found so much amusement in his part of the escapade, and had entertained him

with the legend of Mr. Smith. Neither did he reflect that it was quite possible that Violet Chesterfield had made use of his assistance with reluctance, and only because her escape was impossible without it. He was far too angry to give really cool thought to anything, and he summed up his verdict on the whole affair in a single little word—'low.'

When a woman behaves very badly to a man who is really attached to her, the man does one of two things. Either he forgives her and then loves her ten times better than he did before, or, if he does not forgive her, he sooner or later hates her. A man seldom forgives a woman for being unladylike. A man seldom forgives a woman who wounds his *amour propre.* A man never forgives a woman who wrongs him and then disappears. To

pardon, he must at least be able to see her.

And Warrington was beginning to be aware already of a revulsion of feeling that turned against his mistress, and grew sour with hatred. Probably, had he tried, he could not have helped it. And perhaps he would have been a rather poor-spirited mortal if he had tried. Men are not to be asked to retain their esteem for women in spite of anything the woman may do.

Having got thus far whilst dressing and shaving, Warrington proceeded to breakfast. Eustace was already waiting for him. Over the breakfast-table the brothers discussed what should be their plans; Warrington a little sulky and very savage, Eustace quiet and cool as he always was, and, as he often was, a little philosophical.

'You've been badly treated by your *fiancée*, Frank,' he admitted. 'The best thing you can do is to forget it.'

'No doubt: only how?'

'Let us go down to that place in Dorsetshire, and, instead of selling it, live there. You won't be wanting now to marry for a year or two.'

'For a year or two! Never, my dear fellow. I have had a lesson in what women are. You don't find me putting my neck into that noose again.'

'That may be, or not. Only, if you are not going immediately to marry, there is no reason why we should not go and live, at any rate for a time, at Lynhurst. You will be able to afford to spend something on the place, and that may very likely in the end pay you well. At any rate, you can hunt, and I will grow roses. To live

in the country will be paradise to me. So I propose that we betake ourselves to Lynhurst. But I don't want to be selfish. Take the day to think about it; to see whether you would like it, too. And we will talk the matter over again in the evening.'

'It is certainly worth thinking of,' admitted Warrington.

Rising from the breakfast-table, he lighted a cigar, and asked,

'You see a good deal, Eustace, that most of us do not see. Did you think this affair between me and my cousin would end like this?'

'No, I did not. I thought that she would marry you. May I tell you why?'

'Pray, do not hesitate.'

'I thought she would marry you to get

away from grandfather. Only, you see, she has managed that somehow else.'

'Cutting, Eustace.'

'The truth, Frank.'

Warrington went out to see the general, and left Eustace alone.

'Frank has been shamefully used,' said the blind man to himself. 'But he was a good deal too ready to believe that the girl admired him and liked him more than she did. And, of course, he was ignorant of how miserable she and her sister were with the general. Though why people should be able to perceive less with five senses than with four is an odd problem. Now, too, of course, Frank will be out of humour with all the sex.'

He was right about that. When a man has singled out one amongst women as more worth believing in and loving than

all the rest, and found her faithless, it is easier for his vanity to change his opinion of all womankind than to confess his personal incapacity to distinguish a woman worth having.

And, making his way to the general's, Warrington was soliloquizing thus: 'One hears it said, that women are a bad lot. But I have never hitherto given my assent to it. Only this is a somewhat staggering experience. I should have said that those two girls were ladies—if there be any such things. Only it seems that "lady" is far from being the correlative of "gentlewoman."'

He found the general in bed, ill, and very, very cross. The old man was hungry, and had not been able to eat his breakfast. Warrington was rather alarmed at his yellow appearance. But the general was so out

of temper, so furious that his granddaughters should have run away from his house, so angry at the failure of his cherished scheme of marrying his eldest grandson to his eldest granddaughter, so put out about the breakfast he had not been able to eat, and so resolved to mix all these subjects together, that no connected conversation of any kind was to be got from him.

While Warrington was with him, Essie's letter arrived. The doctor had just called, and insisted on the general's being kept quiet. Of course the letter put him into a frightful passion; to crown which he declared his intention of having everything that the doctor had forbidden for luncheon.

On Frank Warrington the note had no effect of any kind. He had made up his

mind about the Misses Chesterfield, and Essie's letter merely served to confirm him in his opinion.

For the rest, he was thankful enough to find that there would be no occasion to make investigations about what had become of the girls.

When he returned to his brother at dinner-time, he said,

'I have been thinking of your proposal, and I like it. We will go down and live at Lynhurst. And we'll see whether we can't do some good with the place. And at any rate we shall be out of the reach of hearing anything about this affair, and out of the way of all these cursed women.'

'Lynhurst must be a strange place if there are no women there,' thought Eustace to himself; 'and Frank must

know that as well as I.' But aloud he said only, 'That is it, then. We'll go down to Lynhurst.'

CHAPTER VIII.

So after all the new master of Lynhurst did not sell the place, but came to live in it.

The brothers sent down their furniture and Frank Warrington's horses. They put up at the 'London Hotel,' and had the small suite of rooms, in which the former owner of Lynhurst had lived, refurbished, and a part of the large, long-empty stables made fit for use. And in a very few days they had established themselves, comfortably

enough for bachelors, in their new home, and began to look about them.

They found that they had a good house, a handsome house it would be if put into repair, and properly furnished, and what might be a beautiful place if they could find the judgment, money, and energy to make it so. They had what might be capital preserves ; they had what might be beautiful pastures. The point was to make them such. The dilapidations were terrible, and the mortgages very formidable. But the enterprise of redeeming the place was an engaging one, and the young men entered upon it at any rate with zest and spirit, and a resolution to do their best.

They had come to live in a quiet way and they carried out their intention. They breakfasted at an earlier hour than in town,

and devoted the mornings to business, to becoming acquainted with the property, to seeing what could be done for it, and to making arrangements to have it done. Together they went about all over the place on foot; and what a treat that was to Eustace, who was fond of walking, and promised himself soon to be so familiar with the whole neighbourhood that he would be able not only to walk about his brother's estate unaccompanied, but to stroll down to the little town, and to manage all his own business there without the assistance of his valet, indispensable in London.

In business matters, meanwhile, in the choice of servants, employment of hands, and other such affairs, he proved of the greatest service to his brother. His delicate ear was so quick to detect in the

turn of a voice indications of incapacity or deceit, which people, accustomed to study to deceive the eye only, were negligent to conceal. In the evenings the brothers had the same pastimes as in town. Warrington read aloud, or they sat down together to chess, or Eustace took out his violin, or opened the piano. In the big house, Eustace could enjoy his indoor pleasures better than in town, as well as in the grounds those of the open air. A grand piano would have somewhat crowded the London chambers; but here he had one of the large rooms opening from their little suite for a music-room. Frank Warrington, devoted to his brother, had at least this gratification, if no other, from his country life, to see how enormously Eustace's pleasures had been in an instant enlarged. Even the site for the rose-

garden had been already chosen, and the ground partly laid out according to Eustace's design, and some of the rose-trees planted.

Lynham, however, was a little disappointed. Two young bachelors who came to do the best thing they could for their estates, and lived in rather a secluded way, were not what people had expected. They were both in excellent health, and so of no use to Dr. Gregg. They preferred having things from London to paying fifty per cent. more for inferior articles in a small Lynham shop; and so were of no use to the tradespeople. The elder brother, who was 'the rich one,' was reputed rather morose, and the younger was blind and poor; and so they were of no use to the pining virgins of Lynham. Howbeit, as they came with excellent introductions,

and Warrington at once subscribed handsomely to the nearest hunt (though he made, and kept to, a resolution not to follow the hounds more than once a week), they were well received. The rector, and Dr. Gregg, and Brown of the bank, and the local solicitor called, and Eustace received them, and was considered an agreeable and accomplished young fellow. Being at the same time less engaged than his brother, and, like many blind people, a bright conversationalist, fond of talking, and always ready for a chat, he was considered, in a small way, an acquisition. But it was clear that the universally useful, public-spirited, much-desiderated ideal owner of Lynhurst had, after all, not come.

A month soon slipped away. Eustace already began to find his way, unaccom-

panied, about the parts of the ground nearer the house; and Warrington was deeply engaged in his schemes for doing as much as he could afford for the estate —very much less, alas, than the state of the place required. He and Eustace knew still very little of their neighbours, though they had already received two or three invitations, one only of which had been accepted, and that much more for Eustace's sake than for Warrington's. To Frank Warrington, just at present, the greatest treat in the world was to be left to himself; to indulge himself with a long, solitary walk or ride, sometimes in the country, sometimes along the long sands, which presented, when the tide was low, a promenade of several miles, and no bad place for a gallop. The change of scene and of occupation had done much to take

him out of himself, and to divert his thoughts from recollections of his cousin's behaviour. But, when he did recollect her, neither change of occupation nor of scene served much to qualify the bitterness with which he judged her perfidy, or, rather, that of all her sex. At such times to saunter by the sea, or to ride slowly in the low evening light across the downs, smoking a good cigar, and letting his anger cook in his breast, afforded him a savage satisfaction of a sort that will perhaps be better understood by men than by women.

It was in this humour that he, one afternoon late in November, strolled down to the beach, after having been into Lynham on business.

At four o'clock the sun was already setting. The short afternoon was closing

apace and the few people remaining on the beach were leaving it. The sky was grey with dull clouds, a breeze, growing chilly, passed over the sands, blowing nearly parallel with the shore. The sea was neither calm nor rough: a restless, choppy sea that broke coldly in low, curling waves, monotonously, almost mournfully. A good deal of rain had fallen recently, and the cliffs were soaked with moisture. Down their faces trickled little streams, whose ceaseless dropping made a wistful accompaniment to the cold splashing of the sea, and to the soughing of the wind. The circumstances were hardly such as anyone would have been expected to choose for a walk on the sands, but they assorted with Frank Warrington's humour, and going down to the waterside he strolled on along the beach.

The tide was rising, but had hardly yet reached the half-flood, and there was a broad tract of fine sand, tightly cemented by the water it contained, firm and pleasant for walking. Not at all displeased to see the grey light fading, nor to have the lonely beach to himself, Frank Warrington sauntered on a long way, occupied only with his own thoughts, now and then stopping to look seaward, not at anything in particular, but only at the restless movement of the cold waves; and then again strolling on, dashing away from time to time a broken shell or a fragment of seaweed that lay in his path—angrily, impatiently. He was very savage this afternoon, savage with that seething, fermenting anger which works in all the male animals when irritated by the caprices of feminine

humour. Somehow he believed that he could with satisfaction have taken a woman, any woman not too old, and have wrung her neck, just to convince her what he thought of the whole of her species.

'The miserable lying wretches!' he said in himself, sulkily. 'The devil take the whole tribe of them! I am afraid there is no hope of his doing that. But he may have me if I ever again put myself in the way of being fooled by one of them.'

And striking an ancient, fishless shell he sent it flying into the sea.

CHAPTER IX.

He strolled on a long way. The tide had yet far to rise before it could inconvenience his return. The twilight began to turn to gloom, and the beach had become quite deserted. But when a man is very angry it is pleasant to wander in solitude by the sea with the shades of night falling, and no light to be seen but the white gleam of the surf.

The beach was not everywhere of the same breadth. At some places the cliffs presented to the sea a long flattish face, at

others they advanced a bit, and then fell back again, making small bays, or wound in and out irregularly. There were points where at high water it was not possible to pass in front of them, and there the sands were more level, broad plateaux of rocks, bordered with sea-weed, stretched out towards the sea, and the cliffs rose high in tall, perpendicular peaks. Warrington passed several of these headlands, having satisfied himself each time, by a glance at the tide, that he should be easily able to return.

All of a sudden he was surprised to see, only a little way in front of him, a figure loom out of the gloom. It was so dark that any object became indistinguishable at a distance of a few yards. The figure approached, moving very slowly, as slowly as he was walking himself. Was it some

other man come to sulk by the sobbing sea, in the dark? No. It was a woman: a girl. She was nearer now. A tall girl, apparently fashionably-dressed, wearing a high hat; with her hands hanging before her tucked into her muff; walking slowly, her head bent, and her eyes on the ground.

When they were nearer, she saw Warrington. He thought she started. Then they passed quite close to each other. Without turning his head, Warrington stole a hard questioning look at her from the corners of his eyes. And, at the same instant, the girl, without turning her head, stole a precisely similar hard questioning look at him from the corners of her eyes.

For a moment the two keen, searching glances met—her eyes were nearly level

with his—and then both quickly looked away.

'He looks handsome. What on earth can he be walking about here in the dark for?' thought the girl—it was Lily Hardwick—as she passed on.

'She looks pretty. What on earth can she be walking about here in the dark for?' thought Warrington, as he walked on.

Stopping, and standing facing the sea, he turned his head, and looked after her.

He could just see her. She was walking very slowly; had she, too, turned? No; her figure was disappearing—had disappeared.

But he was mistaken, Lily had stopped. Her curiosity had been as much exercised as his. And across the murky night the

two had looked questioningly into each other's faces, and had seen nothing, and passed on.

Warrington fell back upon his own thoughts, and strolled perhaps as much as half-a-mile farther.

A noise behind him suddenly arrested his slow steps. It was a singular noise. Was it a squall, a sudden fierce storm coming over the sea, for there was a sound of something rushing, a sound not unlike water pouring heavily? Only there was a distinct rumble. It could hardly be distant thunder. The noise had none of the character of thunder. Perhaps an explosion at a gunpowder magazine a long way off. Only where were there any magazines? The sound lasted a perceptible time, and seemed divided into three intervals, of which the third was the

loudest and longest. Then again all was silent. Only the waves plashed on, and the cold night wind moaned under the cliffs.

Wondering what it could be, Warrington walked a few steps farther. Then the same sound reached him again. Only this time it was briefer, and not nearly so loud.

What could it be? He stopped again and then turned back. He could not go much farther. There was another headland not far in front, to round which required lower water. The breakers were already washing against its base. And the noise had awakened his curiosity. So he turned, and strolled back towards Lynham, keeping along by the gleaming surf.

Before long, out of the gloom, came

again a figure. This time, too, walking towards him. It was the girl again. Only this time she walked fast. She had her muff, thrust back like a great cuff, upon her arm hanging by her side. Her other hand was raised to her face. She was holding something against her cheek—her handkerchief, and she hurried over the damp sands swiftly.

As Warrington was passing, she stopped.

'I beg your pardon,' she said quickly, in a soft, musical voice. 'But you cannot pass that way, the cliff has fallen.'

'The cliff fallen!'

'A great piece of it. It reaches right into the sea.'

As Warrington only looked surprised and said nothing, she continued, pointing with the hand that was thrust through her muff,

'There are steps in the next cove to the top of the cliff.'

And she moved to go on.

'But the water, madam, is already up to the cliff that way.'

'Oh, no. Not yet. Impossible!' she answered, incredulously; and with a tiny bend of her head she went on.

Warrington knew that the water was up to the cliff. He had seen it. He waited till the stranger was out of sight, and then he went on to inspect the fallen cliff. It extended in a great landslip many yards into the sea, and through the darkness, that rendered any clear view of what had happened impossible, were plainly audible ominous sounds of the occasional thud of stones still falling or of mud slipping down.

Clearly he was a prisoner till the tide

should ebb. And so was the young lady. He turned and walked back in the direction she had taken.

By-and-by he came again to the other end of the bay. And there was the girl. She was looking nervously at the sea which was getting deep under the cliff.

Warrington passed her and looked at it, too, for several minutes; then, submitting to necessity, he proceeded to light a cigar.

Lily Hardwick looked at him hard. Was he not going to speak to her?

The cigar was lighted, and Warrington threw away the vesta, and, pushing his hands into the pockets of his short coat, proceeded to walk back in the direction of Lynham. Lily had followed every movement intently, and looked after him wistfully as he left her.

But, when an instinct of chivalry is

innate in a man, a great many women may treat him very ill, and yet, if he finds a young and pretty woman in a predicament, he will not be able to avoid coming to her assistance. So Frank Warrington took only a very few steps, and then turned back to the stranger.

'I am afraid that it is no go,' he said, putting down his cigar, and pointing to the deep water under the cliff, and taking their common calamity for an introduction.

'Ah, no! But what is to be done?' asked poor Lily, in a tone that showed her to be much more frightened than Warrington had supposed, and very pleased to be spoken to.

'Nothing; but to wait for the tide to turn.'

'But at high tide the water comes right

up to the cliff, all along the bay.'

'Indeed! Are you sure? Anyhow it cannot be very deep,' said Warrington, encouragingly. 'Evidently we are prisoners here. And perhaps it may be as well to reconnoitre whether there is not some place above high-water mark. Suppose,' he suggested, 'we walk along under the cliff and see?'

'Under the cliff! Oh, no, thank you,' exclaimed Lily, drawing back. 'These cliffs come down. I've had enough of them for this evening.'

'You were near the cliff, then, when it fell?'

Near! she was all but underneath it. And when she heard the crack, and saw the great black masses come toppling forward in the gloom, one piece after another, and each larger than the last,

with stones flying about in the air all around her little head,—she hadn't had a fright either, of course not! She described it all very graphically; but no more going near the cliff for her, no, thank you.

Warrington could not help laughing.

'It is not likely that any more will come down to-night,' he said, easily. 'Anyhow, I'll walk along under the cliff, and reconnoitre, and come and tell you. Meanwhile, if you will pardon my offering advice, you had better walk up and down. It is cold.'

He proceeded to make his inspection. All along packed close under the cliffs he found a heap of broken sea-weeds and rack, that proved the tide came up to them. Only here and there a rock cropped out, and offered a little coigne of vantage. If the sea was not rough, the tops of those

rocks might remain dry. His investigations being finished, he returned to his companion in misfortune. Keeping the end of his cigar in view, she had come along with him, walking by the edge of the sea.

'You are right,' he said. 'The water does come to the base of the cliff. But there are a few rocks here and there.'

'Close under the cliff only,' answered the girl, distrustfully.

'But the only alternative will be to stand in the sea.'

'Oh, good gracious——' began Lily, with her breast heaving.

The falling cliffs had given her a fright that had evidently unnerved her. And, indeed the occurrence might have unnerved courage made of stouter stuff.

'Come now!' said Warrington, kindly.

'Don't be frightened. Our situation is really much more ridiculous than dangerous. At the worst we shall probably be up to our ankles in sea-water for an hour or so, nothing more. As for risks, there are risks everywhere, are there not? And you see, after all, it is best to face them pluckily. And I am sure you have some courage, now, haven't you? And so you must try to be brave, you know. Now, suppose we make the best of it, forget all about the cliffs, and walk up and down, and try to keep ourselves warm: may I offer you my arm?'

The girl hesitated for a moment, and then quickly put her arm within his.

'I'll try to be plucky,' she said, stepping out by his side, 'but I am awfully frightened.'

'You have had a fright, you see—you'll

feel all right again presently. There is no real danger. This is, in fact, only a very ridiculous adventure, I assure you.'

'I'm sure it's awfully kind of you to take so much trouble to help one to get over one's fears,' answered the girl, gratefully. 'Light another cigar, do. I don't mind the smoke, and I am sure you will enjoy it, and some one may see the light and come to help us.'

He lighted a cigar, and then they walked up and down, up and down, on the beach that presently grew much narrower. He had travelled, and he talked to her about things he had seen; and he had read a good deal, and told her about things he had read. He was one of the men who had the knack of amusing women; and, listening to him, Lily began to forget everything else.

But presently she said,

'What a lot you have read. You seem to have read almost everything.'

'Oh, dear no. But I have a brother who is blind, poor fellow; and I read a good deal to him. Often the same book, when he likes it, several times over.'

'Ah, then,' said the girl, a little archly, 'I know, I think, who you are. You are Mr. Warrington of Lynhurst.'

'I am.'

'And this,' thought Lily, 'is the man whom everyone calls so morose and disagreeable. I only wish there were more men like him.' Still, she did not tell him that: but requested only to hear the rest of what he had been relating.

By-and-by, the sands being more level on the top, the tide came in very fast.

'Now we must go to those rocks,' said Warrington. 'You won't be frightened.'

'You'll stay with me.'

'Certainly.'

It was horribly cold on the rock, though he did his best to shelter her. He offered her his coat, but she refused it.

'No, no—no, no,' she said, almost crossly, 'you want it yourself. I am not very cold;' which last was not true.

As Warrington had anticipated, the tide did not reach the top of the rock. They got a little splashed, that was all.

And all the time he still talked on to the girl, keeping her amused out of a mine of reminiscences that was apparently inexhaustible, and which he had the art to make entertaining. The tide turned, the sea gave them back first a little, and soon an ample tract of sand on which to try to recover their limbs from the stiffness and the cold, and at last, retiring from the base

of the cliff, set its prisoners free ; the whole affair turning out, as Warrington had predicted, to be a ridiculous adventure and nothing worse. Only the girl, though she showed a good deal of spirit in trying to conceal the fact, was evidently ready to sink with fatigue.

The steps were soon reached. Warrington gave her his arm up them, and then they found themselves in a lane.

'You live at Lynham?' he asked.

'No, I live quite near here. At Cliff Cottage. Our garden has a gate into the lane only a little way farther back. You will come in, will you not?' she continued, 'my cousin is sure to be up, and she will be very glad to see you ; you must be very cold, and you will let me offer you something in return for all your kindness?'

But he declined. He would walk straight back to Lynhurst.

They soon reached the gate, and Lily opened it with a latch-key.

'There is a light in the drawing-room,' she said, looking in. 'My cousin is up. Won't you come in and take something?'

But he declined again.

'Then good-night,'—she offered her hand, and, with it resting in his, continued—'and thank you so much for being so kind to me.'

The door closed behind her, and Frank Warrington went on up the lane. He half wished now that he had accepted the girl's invitation. Now that she was gone, he was oppressed with an odd sense of loneliness. What had passed between him and this young girl—who had walked arm and arm with him for a few hours, who

had managed to be brave because he protected her, who had consented for a while to rest her shoulder against his—that he should feel so odd a loneliness when she left him?

CHAPTER X.

Lily Hardwick followed a little path for a short distance, and then, leaving it, struck across the lawn.

The cottage and the fir-trees around it made a single black mass in the background, but in two of the lower windows lights gleamed brightly through the down-drawn blinds.

'Perhaps your friends, missing you, will send some one to find you. Did they know that you were on the beach?' Warrington had asked, as they were walking together

on the sands. And Lily had answered: 'Oh, no, my cousin won't send anyone. She will know that I am somewhere.' But now she said to herself,

'I hope Maud has not been anxious about me.'

She need not have distressed herself. In the drawing-room of Cliff Cottage, prettily lighted by shaded lamps and warmed by a fire of glowing coals, Mrs. Gainsborough was bearing very philosophically any apprehensions to which her cousin's absence might have given birth.

Seated, or more accurately rather reclining upon a rug on the drawing-room floor, at a little distance from the warm fire, with her elbow on a low chair and her head pensively supported on her hand, Maud Gainsborough was idly regarding the glowing coals, listening to the stillness of

the country night, unbroken by any sound except the soughing of the wind amongst the pines, and indulging herself in a long reverie.

She was a woman in whose nature reverie and imagination predominated strongly. To-night, minutes had passed, quarters-of-an-hour, hours, and still all the time, moving only a little now and then, Mrs. Gainsborough had been there, crouched upon the rug, immersed in her meditations.

Her thoughts were of a young widow, a very young widow, one five-and-twenty only, and in appearance quite a girl, a young girl. The widow was tall and handsome, and had brains, and—in a way—courage. She had a graceful figure, too, and a picturesque face, deep dreaming eyes, and beautiful black hair. Her husband

had been dead some years. His death she did not regret. Perhaps she loved him once. Perhaps not. Certainly she did not love him when he died. Their existences had proved very uncongenial. And the widow was well-pleased to be freed from him, and to call her own, her beauty, and her courage, and—her fifteen thousand a-year.

This young widow of whom she was thinking, naturally interested Mrs. Gainsborough very much: for the young widow was herself. Hers the unregretted husband, who had died some years ago; hers the dark dreaming eyes, and the other charms (perhaps she flattered them a little to herself) only not hers, unfortunately, the fifteen thousand a-year.

Mrs. Gainsborough was building air-castles then? No. Not that either ex-

actly. The fifteen thousand a-year *was;* only it was not Mrs. Gainsborough's—though it might have been; that is, if Lily Hardwick had not stood between her and the possession of it. Not that it was Lily Hardwick's, either, though it might have been, if Lily had been aware of its existence and had known how to set to work to get it. This fifteen thousand a-year, which formed so integral a part of Mrs. Gainsborough's day-dreams, was safe in the custody of the Court of Chancery, where, for the present, having mentioned its existence, it will suffice to let it rest.

And Mrs. Gainsborough had, instead of this splendid fortune, an income of a much smaller and more precarious sort, a little jointure: one hundred and fifty pounds per annum; and an allowance made her by her brother-in-law, Anthony Gainsborough,

two hundred a-year, on condition that she lived at Cliff Cottage, Lynham, which he let her have rent free. A very, very sore subject this with the young widow, this 'wretched two hundred,' and all the conditions that 'that Anthony Gainsborough' had attached to it. But when one has no money, you know, how can one help one's-self? It made only three hundred and fifty. And Maud Gainsborough could not live at Cliff Cottage on three hundred and fifty. At least, so she had said to herself. Howbeit, happily her cousin Lily Hardwick, who was an orphan, had wished very much to live with her; and as Lily's guardian had nothing to say to the contrary, Lily came, and with her another two hundred. Besides which, Lily had a liberal allowance to do as she liked with, so that the two ladies made up be-

tween them something nearer seven hundred than six. And on that they *could* live.

Howbeit, although, with the assistance of her cousin, Maud Gainsborough had arrived at those happy figures, so vainly desired by many—the number of pounds on which to live *is* possible—yet the widow's imagination would at times, as to-night, busy itself with that one thing wanting to complete the ideal she had of herself—the fifteen thousand a-year of her own. And, when Maud Gainsborough fell to thinking about that, her thoughts were generally long and serious.

To-night they were very serious.

When she came in, it was a little before dinner-time. She had asked of her servant,

'Is Miss Hardwick in, Ann?'

'Miss Hardwick came in and went out again, ma'am.'

'Where did she go? Do you know?'

'She went into the town, ma'am. She said she thought she should walk along the beach.'

They frequently walked into the town along the beach when the tide was low. The road was steep, and often very muddy, and the sands level and clean.

'You don't know whether she did go along the beach, Ann?' asked Maud.

'No, ma'am.'

Maud Gainsborough went upstairs. Before the maid-servant, she had allowed nothing to escape her that could raise in the girl any suspicion of the serious nature of her information. But, on reaching her room, she sat down, and with her face paled with excitement, asked herself,

'Is it possible?'

Just before leaving Lynham she had heard of the fall of the cliffs. The whole of the town was in a fever of excitement at the news, for it was reported that there were men out on the beach.

If Lily Hardwick had gone along the sands to Lynham?

Dinner-time came, and Lily did not return.

'I'll dine, Ann,' said the widow. 'I daresay Miss Hardwick has stopped at Dr. Gregg's.'

Lily was a favourite of Dr. Gregg's.

'At what time did Miss Hardwick start to go to Lynham, Ann?' continued the widow.

'About half-past four, ma'am.'

Maud Gainsborough thought:

'And the cliff fell a few minutes after

five. If Lily walked fast she had passed the place. In that case she is really gone to the Greggs. If she walked slowly—she must have walked very slowly not to have reached that part of the beach by five. Is it possible? But I shall be very sorry, too, for poor Lily.'

The widow dined; and went to the drawing-room; and had her coffee; and still her cousin had not returned.

She took up a book and tried to read. But the words swam before her eyes. If anything should have happened to Lily!

Mrs. Gainsborough slipped gently from her chair to the floor, and surrendered herself to her reverie.

Suppose—not that the widow wished it; not at all; she would be horribly sorry if anything happened to Lily; the amusing

little puss !—still, suppose that some accident had happened ? Then—there was nothing more between her and the fifteen thousand a-year !

Could it really be true ? True, perhaps, this very night, that that fifteen thousand a-year was hers !

It was true, certainly—if anything had happened to Lily.

Lily was not aware of the fact, nor had the faintest suspicion of it. No one had any suspicion of it, neither Lily, nor Lily's friends, nor Mrs. Gainsborough's friends, nor anyone in the whole wide world. The secret was all the widow's own, and had been so ever since the day when she discovered it.

But—if anything happened to Lily.

Then the money was the widow's: yes, this very night !

And, lying before the fire, Maud Gainsborough repeated to herself, 'Can it be? Has my day-dream turned actually into reality?'

She fell to thinking what she would do, of the steps she would take: of the letter she would write to Anthony Gainsborough—ah! what a letter that should be! And if the future that should follow—that brilliant fairy-land future.

Ten o'clock! If Lily was at Dr. Gregg's she would return soon now.

Half-past ten. And no Lily. Her prolonged absence became strange, unaccountable. Something must have happened.

Maud Gainsborough rose and rang the bell, and gave orders that the groom should go at once into Lynham to Dr.

Gregg's and find out if Miss Hardwick was there.

The man returned a little after eleven.

Miss Hardwick had not been at Dr. Gregg's,—and the cliff had fallen.

Mrs. Gainsborough asserted at once her disbelief that the cliffs had anything to do with Miss Hardwick's absence. Miss Hardwick must be at Mrs. Brown's, or perhaps at the rectory, they always kept late hours at the rectory. She would sit up for Miss Hardwick. Ann and the cook could go to bed.

And she sat down again on the rug before the fire.

Poor Lily!

But the fifteen thousand! A feverish excitement obtained possession of Mrs. Gainsborough; her pulse became quick,

and her cheek flushed. The drawing-room clock struck half-past eleven with a soft, silvery chime; and, overstrung in every nerve, she started almost as if she had received a blow. Then she sank again into her former position.

Lily crushed under the falling cliffs! Fifteen thousand a-year! Was it possible? Fifteen thousand a-year. After all: fifteen thousand a-year!

Any other woman would have been pacing the room unable to remain still, with these torrents of excitement coursing in her veins. But Maud had passed through moments more feverish, even, than this; and her muscles had been schooled sternly to obey, not her emotions, but her will.

Still at last even she moved as if she would get up.

St! What is that?—a step?—yes—on the lawn.

Yes. It comes nearer. And Maud Gainsborough sits up listening.

A tap at the window and a voice:

'Maud, Maud.'

Lily! No fifteen thousand a-year to-night.

A momentary contraction of Maud Gainsborough's handsome face; an instant of disappointment, disillusion; and then, as she rose, her lips parted in a smile, and she almost laughed a little laugh at her own folly, with an easy toss of her head as she came to the window to open it.

'Good heavens, Lily! Where have you been?'

'Oh, I am half dead, Maud!' said the girl, sinking on a chair. 'I'll tell you

all about it presently. But, dear, give me something warm to drink. I am perishing with cold.'

Maud Gainsborough bustled about the house, and, in fewer minutes than might have been thought possible, she had prepared with her own hands a cup of cocoa, and kneeling before the drawing-room fire, to which she had made her cousin come closer, was warming some ox-tail soup in a little saucepan. And meanwhile Lily related her adventures.

Maud put her to bed, and brought her up a hot-water bottle, and insisted upon her drinking a little hot wine and water. If the fifteen thousand a-year had depended upon her cousin's life, not on her death, she could not have been more careful or more kind.

'I only hope Lily won't have rheuma-

tism, or pleurisy, or anything serious,' she said to herself, going to her own room after having shut up the house and put out the lights: 'I suppose an awful cold is inevitable.'

CHAPTER XI.

Apparently the cold was inevitable. At any rate Lily Hardwick had one; and for the next few days was confined to her room. She even developed a little hacking cough, and complained of pains in her chest. Mrs. Gainsborough began to be a little alarmed, and called in Dr. Gregg.

The quality on which Dr. Gregg most prided himself was his power of intuition. One look at a patient, and Dr. Gregg knew all about what was the

matter. The widow had mentioned that her cousin had a nasty little hacking cough and complained of pain in her chest, and the doctor was able to make a good beginning.

'Ah, I see, Miss Hardwick,' he commenced. 'Now you have a nasty little hacking cough, eh?'

'Yes, Dr. Gregg.'

'And a pain in your chest?'

'Yes, a little.'

'Ah, you see. I can see it all. And when you cough it hurts you a great deal?'

'N-o.'

'No! Ah, well, in some cases a cough of this character is not accompanied by any particular pain, in other cases there is a good deal of pain. But, I see, in your case there is no pain. A tiresome little cough,

and a little uncomfortableness about the lungs. And—now—you don't sleep very well.'

'Oh, but, yes, I think I sleep much the same as usual.'

'You sleep much the same as usual? Ah yes, you sleep much the same as usual. Heaviness about the head; eh?'

He was feeling her pulse.

'Yes.'

'You see, I know all about it, my dear young lady. Cough, not painful; some uncomfortableness about the chest; sleep well, heaviness: pulse a little feverish. But—appetite, eh? now I am right, am I not—bad appetite?'

'No-o. I don't think so, doctor.'

'No, not bad appetite. Well, sometimes there is no loss of appetite in those cases. I see—appetite good, sleep well. Tiresome

little cough—occasional pain in chest. Heaviness about head; pulse a trifle rapid, but appetite good. We shall soon set you up again, Miss Hardwick. I will send you a little prescription which you will take, won't you? We shall soon set you up again.'

'What an ass he is!' quoth Mrs. Gainsborough to herself, standing by the fire.

'No occasion for alarm, my dear Mrs. Gainsborough,' said the doctor, reassuringly, as he left. 'Just as well, though, to have taken it in time. I shall send Miss Hardwick a little draught.' And, going along the little drive to the gate, he continued to himself, 'Nothing of importance. Send her something quite harmless. Leave it to Nature.'

So Lily was left to Dame Nature, and to her cousin's nursing. It was the best

thing that Dr. Gregg could do for her. He was seldom dangerous, so long as he did nothing.

Healthy young blood, and the nursing, soon got the better of the cold. After a day or two in bed, Lily was able to sit up in her room, and to amuse herself with writing letters. At the end of the week, though she was still not to go out of the house for some days, she was downstairs again in the drawing-room.

Towards the end of an afternoon—Mrs. Gainsborough had gone into Lynham, and not yet returned—Lily received an answer to one of her letters, written to a school-fellow in London. She had related briefly her adventure on the beach as the occasion of the cold that had made her a prisoner in her room, and in reply her friend wrote:

'Your adventure, dear, really was very nearly *most romantic.* The tide really ought to have risen a little higher, so that you might have been in some *danger;* only just a little, wee bit, but enough for Mr. Warrington to have *really saved you.* But, even as it was, he was really most *chivalrous*, and, as he is reputed to be so *morose*, you must feel quite *vain.* I am sure you will like to know all about him; and, as it happens, I can tell you something I heard only last week, and which [*sic.*] I believe is *half a secret.*—The real reason why he went to live at Lynham. Two months ago, he was engaged to his cousin. She is *very beautiful*, but *quite heartless*, and he was *most desperately* in love with her.'

And here followed the history of how Warrington was duped into assisting the flight of the Misses Chesterfield, with many

embellishments of the facts, and a lavish use of italics. The writer of the letter was responsible for the italics, but not for the embellishments; they were simply the natural accretions the story had gathered in town.

Lily Hardwick read it twice. She had not yet arrived at the age that replies to any history with an incredulous 'And how much of that is fact?' and without hesitation accepted for truth all that her friend had written her. Putting down the letter on her lap, she leaned forward, with her cheek rested on her hand, and thought.

She felt very sorry for Mr. Warrington, rather indignant too. She would have liked to have had it in her power to 'pay out' that cousin of his for the way she had treated him. Poor Mr. Warrington!

No wonder he was morose! And this, then, was why he had come to bury himself in the country.

She read the short concluding portion of the letter, and, folding it up, placed it in her pocket, and then went to one of the windows.

Cliff Cottage was a pretty little place, cosy, deeply clad in ivy and creeping plants. It was only two storeys high, but with more room inside it than anyone, acquainted with the exterior only, might suppose. A thatched verandah festooned in the summer with creepers, ran round three sides of the cottage, and, above the verandah, low, half-dormer windows with little diamond casements peeped out coyly, amidst the thick ivy from under the projecting thatch of the roof. On the ground-floor the sitting-room windows

opened to the ground. Inside, there was a little hall, rather dark, with quaint narrow windows of coloured glass that gave a peep into the rustic porch with its low seats; a good broad staircase of shallow stairs; and a really wonderful number of fair-sized rooms. A greenhouse flanked one side; at the back were a convenient little stable-yard and stable, and coach-house. The whole lay planted in a sheltered hollow, a little below the level of the country road that ran behind it, and hidden from view among a small plantation of Scotch firs. Some of the firs grew quite close to the cottage, even spreading their broad branches over its roof. Before it the lawn sloped only very gently, and the garden, sometimes wider, sometimes narrower, winding a little with the turns of a natural hollow, sheltered by trees on either

side, descended slowly to the brink of the cliff. Where the garden ended at the cliff's edge, there was a ladder of steps, leading down to a little cove, inaccessible otherwise, except by boat, even at the lowest tide. The garden itself was exceedingly nicely kept. The closely-shorn lawns, the tidy beds, in which the many-hued chrysanthemums were just now in all their glory, the neatly-clipped shrubs and the handsome forest trees all evinced the most ungrudging care bestowed upon them.

Before Lily's view, as she stood at the window, the view of the long garden wound picturesquely down to the cliff. Beyond, closed in on both sides by the leafless trees, there was a glimpse of the sea. The sun was sinking fast towards the horizon in a ruddy glow, crossed by

hard black bars of clouds lightly edged with saffron, and the low light came up the perspective of the autumn garden with a charming effect.

'How awfully pretty it is here!' said Lily to herself, 'morning, afternoon, and evening, lovely in every light; and how beautifully the sunset must be glowing now, through the woods, at Lynhurst. I wonder whether Mr. Warrington admires the country. Whether all these lovely sights go a little way to console him for the way his cousin used him. I do feel sorry for him! Poor Mr. Warrington!'

Nothing appeals to a young girl's heart more strongly than a story of unhappy love, and this story of the ill-usage of a man, who, a perfect stranger, had been kind to her, stung all Lily's feelings of right and of generosity into a keen indig-

nation. She saw no ludicrous side to the story. She saw only the wrong, the falsehood, the cowardice, the cruelty, the worthlessness of the girl who mercilessly duped the man who loved and trusted her. How angry he must have been! And how grieved too. If he really loved his cousin so much, what a blow for him to find that she did not care for him a bit, that she was so worthless, so undeserving of the affection of any man. And they were engaged, too! To be married in a few days! (that was what the letter said). And he had felt it all so much that he had come down here in the country to bury himself. She would always think quite differently of him now. He seemed altogether another man since she had learned this about him. How she wondered whether he still cared for his cousin.

Surely he could not. Yet men did care for women who behaved very badly to them.

The door opened, and, Maud Gainsborough entering, disturbed Lily's reverie.

In Lynham Maud had met Mrs. Wood, the rector's wife. Mr. Warrington and his brother had been to dine at the rectory. Mrs. Wood thought the blind brother 'very interesting, poor fellow,' Mr. Warrington rather reserved. Oh, and Mr. Warrington's name was Frank.

'I thought you would like to hear all about it, dear, as you take so much interest in the gentleman.'

Thus said the widow in conclusion, with a touch of significance.

But the one word that struck Lily was 'reserved.' No wonder, poor fellow! It would be strange if he were not reserved,

if he ever trusted anyone again as long as he lived, after the way he had been treated.

Quite easily she asked, sitting down,

'Did you ask Mrs. Wood whether she thought him good-looking?'

'Oh, yes, I said I had heard that he was good-looking, and Mrs. Wood said it was quite true. I am really becoming quite curious to see him.'

She stood before the glass unfastening her brooch.

Lily had taken up her work.

'And so Mr. Warrington is called Frank, is he?' she answered. 'That is not a very remarkable name.'

'Everybody is talking about your romantic escape,' went on the widow. 'It has caused, I assure you, almost as much sensation in Lynham as the fall of the cliff.'

'Has it?' asked Lily, indifferently.

Turning over her work, she drew out the needle from the stuff and began to sew, quite unconscious that her cousin was watching her.

'I have been wrong,' said the widow to herself, 'I thought it was a smite. Particularly when she wondered whether he would call to inquire how she was. But she takes it all too indifferently. She has not lost her heart this time.'

Maud Gainsborough was quite right about that. Lily had not lost her heart at all. She liked the man, and, since she had learned his history, she was very sorry for him. And that was all. She was not in love with him, not the least bit in the world. A young girl very seldom falls in love all in a moment.

By-and-by the ladies went upstairs to

dress. In Lily Hardwick's room, a bright fire burned on the hearth. Its leaping flames lighted fitfully the pretty room, with its tasteful satin-wood furniture, and blue silk curtains, and little girlish knick-knacks placed here and there. It was one of the best rooms in the house, and Lily, who had been allowed to furnish it as she pleased, had been a little extravagant. There was a low wicker chair by the fire, and the girl sat down on it, and again drew out her letter.

Once more she read it through. She might have spared herself the trouble, for there was nothing in it of interest but what was already sunk deep into her memory. Then, rising, she crushed the letter in her hand, and threw it into the flames.

'If he comes down here to escape from

all this, at any rate his secret shall be safe with me,' she said.

And lighting her candles she proceeded to dress.

Maud Gainsborough had said that Lily Hardwick's adventure on the beach had occasioned almost as much sensation as the fall of the cliffs, and that was not far from the truth. Almost everyone was talking about it with that eagerness to talk which is indigenous in small places, where there is nothing to talk about. The same afternoon some one mentioned it—with a view to obtaining, if possible, some further information on the topic—to Eustace Warrington. Eustace was a little taken by surprise, for he had not before heard of the incident. But he had more discretion than to betray his ignorance. When, however, he and

Warrington were alone after dinner, he said,

'The other day, when you were caught by the tide, and did not get home here till midnight, there was a young lady, I hear, caught at the same time with you.'

'Yes; some girl who lives at Cliff Cottage.'

'My dear fellow, I wish you had mentioned the fact to me. Why didn't you?'

'Why? I really did not imagine that it was a point of any importance. Why do you wish that I had told you?'

'Because, you see, everyone down here has heard of your adventure; and is talking about you and the young lady. And I, who had heard nothing, when I was this afternoon asked about it, very

nearly looked foolish, I assure you. The man who spoke to me was most desirous to gather up any crumbs of information that were to be had; and if I had been taken off my guard, and he had gone away in a position to inform the next man he met, "Do you know, Mr. Warrington's brother had never heard of it at all, till I told him. There is some mystery in it," he would have been very much delighted. Whether you would have been equally pleased is for you to consider.'

'They may say what they like for anything I care,' remarked Warrington.

'At any rate, my dear Frank, I should like to hear all about it, if you please,' observed Eustace, 'I don't wish again to be taken by surprise, as I was this afternoon.'

The request was reasonable, and War-

rington could not refuse to comply with it. He made the story very short. The blind man listened with a good deal of attention, and asked at the end,

'And Miss Hardwick—for, of course, you have learnt her name by this time—a nice girl, rather, is she not?'

'I am not a judge of girls. I daresay she is well enough,' answered Warrington.

He did not deny that he had acquainted himself with her name.

The conversation dropped. But Eustace had already learned, at any rate sufficiently for the present, what he was anxious to know. That was not alone what had happened on the evening that his brother had been imprisoned by the sea, but also why Frank had been reticent about a part of his adventures, and whether his reticence had any connection with an altered

humour which he had for the last few days been displaying.

On the evening itself when he came in from the beach about midnight, hungry, cold, and distinctly cross, Eustace had had at once a suspicion of something having taken place beyond what his brother related. At the time Eustace had conjectured some little annoyance about monetary arrangements, for which Warrington was seeking the assistance of the local bank; and he had purposely abstained from asking questions, seeing the business was not exactly his. Since then, however, Eustace had assisted at six distinct long jeremiads on the cursedness of women, the folly of love, the peculiar nature of feminine disingenuousness, and the perfect impossibility of a man's being sufficiently on his guard against the

knavery of young girls. A month since Warrington had declaimed in this way a good deal, as indeed it was very natural that he should. But since he had been in the country, and had interested himself in his estates, he had got the better of this weakness. Now, the sudden recrudescence of his complaint must have had some cause.

Eustace believed that he could now give a shrewd guess at what the cause was. Frank had not returned to Lynhurst quite heart-whole from the five hours spent on the beach in the November night with pretty Lily Hardwick.

And if he had known that Warrington had not only talked to Miss Hardwick (as he said), but had talked to her as kindly and encouragingly as it was possible for a man to do; if he had known that Miss

Hardwick and his brother had not only walked up and down (as Warrington said), but had walked up and down arm-in-arm; if he had suspected that they had not only (as Warrington had related) stood upon a rock, but that the young girl had been glad to lean her shoulder against Warrington's, and that he had put his arm round her to shelter her from the wind—if Eustace had suspected anything of all this—which Warrington did not relate,—he would have been a good deal more certain of his opinion than he was.

Eustace was a bit of a philosopher in his way, and he was not taken by surprise at this new turn of events. On the contrary, he found it rather natural. A man who has just been badly used by one woman is susceptible in the extreme of a sudden

passion for another; and if, at a critical moment, some young girl, bewitching, fresh, uncorrupted, crosses his path, and shows the faintest inclination to like him, he succumbs to her fascinations almost infallibly. And, that this might very probably occur in his brother's case, Eustace Warrington had conceived from the first, especially when Warrington began to vow and protest that he would never marry, nor permit himself again to fall a victim to the seductions of a woman. Do not vows always imply a consciousness of weakness? Could anyone be conceived vowing not to do what he knew was impossible? Briefly, in Eustace's opinion, Frank Warrington was, without having the least suspicion of the fact, on the brink of falling in love. What would ensue depended, unless Eustace was very

much mistaken, upon how much time elapsed before Frank next saw Miss Hardwick, and what might occur on the occasion of their meeting.

CHAPTER XII.

THAT meeting the fates had decreed should take place soon.

In the middle of the next week there was a meet not far from Lynham at a somewhat popular spot, where a large field almost always assembled.

The previous week Warrington had, owing to business, missed his usual outing with the hounds, and, the morning proving promising, he announced at breakfast his intention of going to the meet.

A numerous and picturesque gathering

was already assembled when he arrived, forming under the winter sky an animated scene of men and women, horses, drags, pony-carriages, dog-carts, scarlet coats, pretty costumes, well-cut habits, and rich, warm furs, scattered in many groups with the grey sky overhead, and the copse and pine-woods behind, for a background.

Warrington rode up to some friends, and was talking to the rector's son, when the master came up, and, after wishing him good-morning, said,

'Lady Louisa is anxious to introduce you to two ladies, friends of hers, Mr. Warrington.'

'But, really, Sir Robert—' began Warrington, not looking particularly gratified, and preparing to offer some convenient excuse.

'Nonsense, Mr. Warrington, you must

not refuse,' interrupted Sir Robert, 'I believe that, as a fact, one of the ladies is known to you already. But indeed you must not disappoint Lady Louisa. She is over there by the gate.'

Evidently Warrington was not left much choice of action.

Crossing the field to where the master's wife, in a dark brown habit, was conspicuously mounted on a thorough-bred bay, Warrington perceived with her a young girl, a slight, tall figure whom he had no difficulty in recognising, and a lady in a black habit, with her low hat coquettishly set forward over a very striking face.

'There are two ladies, friends of mine, here, Mr. Warrington,' said Lady Louisa, after their first greeting, 'who very much wish that you should be introduced to them;' and, turning round, she presented

him: 'Mr. Warrington, Mrs. Gainsborough, Miss Hardwick.'

Lily was looking charming. Not a trace of her indisposition was left in her bright young face; and in royal spirits, anticipating a good scamper after the hounds, she was looking as sparkling and gay as summer morning sunshine.

Warrington addressed himself to her first.

'I hope you are none the worse, Miss Hardwick, for that very cold evening spent upon the beach?'

The young girl's lips parted in an arch smile that displayed her small teeth, white as pearls.

'I had a dreadful cold for a few days, but it is all over now,' she answered.

Maud Gainsborough was regarding Warrington from under her brows with a fixed

gaze of her deep, dark eyes. The strange intensity of that gaze had a resemblance to fascination.

And the truth is, Maud was fascinated. The first moment that she saw Frank Warrington, something in his appearance, his handsome, aristocratic face, his carriage, the slightly reserved expression of his features, or all these together, in an instant attracted her regard, and held it rivetted. When Lady Louisa introduced him, as he raised his hat, and his eyes and Maud's for a moment met, something, that passed with the lightning rapidity of an electric shock, troubled the young widow, thrilled into the very core of her being, and even made her, for an instant, change colour.

It seemed to her that she knew this man, had known him for years.

Something about him answered the most familiar impressions of her recollection—or of her imagination. It appeared incredible that she had never seen him before. They must have met somewhere—and she knew him. But she was also sure that they had never met; sure with the most positive assertion of her reason. She could never have met him, and afterwards have forgotten that meeting. Till a moment since, she had never set eyes on him. He had not crossed her path until this instant of their introduction. Her recollection of him, as some one familiar in another world, or known in a previous state of existence, resembled that strange impression of certain recollections which comes upon the imagination in spots never visited before. He was the man that had been at her side

unseen these how many years! in her heart, in her dreams. It was his face, his voice, his bearing that she had been looking for, expecting ever since she had been a young girl. Her real other self was before her, the man whose name fate meant her to bear, whom she had sought and not found in her husband; whom she had looked for, and not seen among her many admirers; the ideal of her maiden fancy, and of her womanhood's yearnings.

It all passed in an instant; that recognition that was not a recognition; that impression that was a fascination; that conviction that was in its first instant—love.

She sat looking at him timidly, half dazzled, listening to what he was saying to her cousin, with her heart beating.

Lily too, though she was chatting with

him merrily, was regarding him with more seriousness in her heart than her laughing lips would have let anyone suppose. This pleasant, agreeable man, who was talking with her, was the man who a few weeks ago was so shamefully used, who held at this moment the secret of it all in his breast. Any morsel of the sadness of life looks large and strange when it comes near, and to Lily it seemed well-nigh impossible that this man who was talking with her could really be the hero of a story of a deceit that had made her blood boil with indignation. And yet she knew that it was so.

None the less she was replying playfully to something that he had said.

'I think I might almost be cross with you, Mr. Warrington. You might have had the chivalry to come and enquire after

my health. Now, don't make excuses off hand. Take your time to think of some good ones.'

Warrington turned to the widow.

'I hope, Mrs. Gainsborough, that you were not very much alarmed about Miss Hardwick that evening.'

'A little,' replied Maud, lying promptly. 'I was dreadfully afraid, you know, that she might have been killed by the fall of the cliffs. I am sure that we are both of us very much obliged to you for all the care you took of her, and very pleased to have found an opportunity of offering you our thanks.' Having made this gracious speech very prettily, she went on, 'I think, Mr. Warrington, that you must know some of my poor husband's friends. He was Mr. Anthony Gainsborough's brother. You know Anthony Gainsborough?'

'I have met him. Rarely though. You know, of course, that he is almost always in his yacht.'

'Ah, the lucky man! yes,' said Maud, dreamily. 'That yacht! I was to have been invited to go a cruise in it once. But the invitation never came.'

'He is a strange man,' observed Warrington. Recently he had found Anthony Gainsborough a very strange man: notably in the way in which he had assisted the flight of the Misses Chesterfield.

'Ah, you know that, then,' observed Maud.

And she looked at Warrington significantly. She and he had found already a secret point of contact.

'You hunt often, Miss Hardwick?' asked Warrington turning to Lily.

'Not very often, Mr. Warrington. I like it, too much. You see,' she explained, laughingly, 'to hunt one should be a little bit staid, sure of never becoming over excited by the chase, always careful to keep on the safe, not to try ticklish jumps, to be content to wait one's turn at the gates, and not to mind coming up when everyone else is riding away after the death. For all that one requires to be rather wise.'

'And you are not always wise?' asked Warrington, laughing, and pleased to hear her confessing so real a zest for the sport.

'Alas no,' replied Lily.

'I shall expect to see you ride home with the brush, Miss Hardwick,' said Warrington.

'Oh, no, please, don't expect anything

of the sort,' returned the girl, quickly. 'I shall not be in at the death. I shall have a good gallop or two, and enjoy myself thoroughly. But I am not a first-class horsewoman, and you must not expect to see me doing wonders. My cousin here is far more likely to be in at the death than I.'

The girl's modest disclaimer was as pretty and natural as her previous confession of keen pleasure in the chase.

'You and I shall very likely, then, have the pleasure of finding ourselves together, Miss Hardwick,' observed Warrington; 'I am a regular cockney, you know, and have a great deal to learn.'

All of a sudden it occurred to him that he was talking a great deal to Miss Hardwick, and very little to her cousin; and so, turning to Maud Gainsborough, he began

to say something to her about Cliff Cottage. The edge of its garden joined one corner of his estate. In the midst of that the hounds were thrown off, and, a general movement ensuing, Warrington wished the ladies a pleasant scamper, and said, 'good-morning.'

It was some time before they got away. One or two coverts were drawn without a whimper, the field, in loose order, moving slowly along the brow of the hill after the dogs. Once, for a few minutes,—at a spot where a little group were assembled, who conjectured the place likely to be a good one for a start in case they found,—Maud discovered herself again near Warrington, and was unable to resist the pleasure of exchanging half-a-dozen words with him. Then, all of a sudden, a holloa came from the other side of the wood, a little way

off, just as the dogs threw up their voices.

In a moment there was a scurry and a rush; the foremost of the field were off, and those around Warrington and the widow wheeled to follow them. From the other points, the others came up helter-skelter, and then in an avalanche they all swept away down the slope, dogs and horses, scarlet coats and dark habits.

In the fore-front was Lady Louisa, Warrington and Maud not very far behind, fairly in the ruck, and Lily amongst those who were bent upon enjoying themselves, with a certain regard to not being a nuisance to the others.

Pug led them first across tolerably open meadow-lands, with little brooks and low fences. The fences little by little scattered

the more timid part of the field in search of gates and convenient gaps. The hounds ran fast, pointing for some way straight up the valley, and only a pick of the field kept near them. Presently they wheeled a little to the left, and then came a broad brook, and a plantation through which the drives were narrow. There were some catastrophes at the brook, and after the plantation only the best riders had the hounds in view, as they followed close upon the fox. But, after a run of nearly half-an-hour, on the brow of the hill, reynard got into a copse, and then the thing was to get him out again; and meanwhile the check allowed a good part of the stragglers to come up. Pug was drawn at last, and a fairish fresh start ensued over the open downs.

Presently the ground dropped and there

came a flight of posts and rails, and then an almost impossible blackthorn hedge with a deep ditch behind. One or two very bold hands ventured at the hedge, but the greater part of the field turned to a gate only a little way out of the line, whilst a few, seeing the crush there was there, preferred another farther out of the track, but less crowded.

Chance favoured these last. As the fox, making a wide detour, came round again towards the hill, many of those at first left far behind, striking out a bold line, managed again to nick in with the foremost of the hunt. Crossing a field Warrington found, amongst a good many others quietly taking their turns to pass, one-by-one, over a stile in the corner, Maud Gainsborough, keeping back a little to allow others to go before her. Warring-

ton had been over this ground only a little time before, and felt sure that by bearing a little more to the left he could take a line better than those in front of him were selecting; and also one not involving waiting for a turn. As he passed Maud Gainsborough, he felt moved to invite her to share the benefit of his knowledge.

He would hardly have done that if it had been Lily. He would have been on his guard. But there is a way of showing a liking for a girl, into which the most cautious of men are easily betrayed, and that is doing little kindnesses to the people who belong to her.

And so Warrington, stopping for a moment by Maud Gainsborough, said,

'Do you feel inclined, Mrs. Gainsborough, to attempt that fence over there at a

weak point, say there,'—he pointed with his hunting-crop—'We could afterwards cut across the meadows beyond by a far shorter route.'

'I think I would try, if you would go first.'

They rode off together, two or three others, as soon as they saw their move, turning to follow them.

'Bravo, Mrs. Gainsborough,' said Warrington, as the young widow came over after him safely, and very prettily too, her neat figure perfectly balanced, as she sat back, with her little hands well down, setting her horse straight at the fence, a momentary flush of excitement lighting her classical face. He had broken the way a little, and made a very fair jump for her.

Across the fields they rode on together,

keeping well in front of the others. The line they were taking should evidently bring them into a good position. But presently, when they came nearer the hounds, they met a rather wide water-jump.

'You can do it?' said Warrington. 'The taking off is good, and the opposite bank sound.'

'There is one man in it already; and those others only just got over.'

'But they are lower down—it is wider there. You will try?'

A nod signified her assent. In her heart she knew she would have put her horse at the English Channel to keep with him.

And they were over—both. But the others had turned aside.

Up the hill. The pace was sharp and

the hill steepened. One of the ladies who had been all the way hitherto in the front dropped behind. There were then only two others now besides Maud. The hounds were topping the brow of the hill, and began to disappear. Then the land became less steep, and they were on the top. And there are the hounds, tearing along a level glade, with the fox in view, as it seems, but a yard or two before them. Some one goes a purl over a fence that Maud crosses flying, following Warrington's lead, she hardly knows how. The horse of one of the ladies has refused that fence. Maud has loosened her rein and is plying her whip. Will it be really with him at her side that she will get the brush? With only her light nine stone to carry, and comparatively fresh, her horse flies with her as if she was but a feather, and she is

neck and neck now with young Mrs. Rivers, the best horsewoman of the hunt.

And, at the death, a neck in front of her.

All except the ladies have jumped off their horses.

As the huntsman comes up with the brush, there seems to be a moment's hesitation.

Maud Gainsborough bows to Mrs. Rivers.

'I think it was a drawn race, Mrs. Rivers,' she says.

'Oh, no, Mrs. Gainsborough, the brush is yours.'

And, as it is fastened to her saddle, Maud turns and says to Warrington, 'I owe this entirely to your kindness, Mr. Warrington,' with a blush of such grati-

fication mantling her beautiful face that the man cannot feel other than flattered.

Lily came up, as she said, when the rest were beginning to think of riding away, having, nevertheless, enjoyed herself royally.

The cousins rode home together unaccompanied.

'You have made quite an impression upon Mr. Warrington, Maud,' said Lily, playfully.

But the young widow made no answer. She had become very pensive. It was not she, she knew, that had made an impression upon Frank Warrington. She saw a great many things too puzzling to be understood by Lily's bright eyes. It was for some one's sake else even, that Frank Warrington had helped her, Maud, to win

that brush at her saddle-bow, or else she knew nothing of men—and she knew something about them.

CHAPTER XIII.

The new year came, and a cold afternoon early in January found Maud Gainsborough sitting close to the drawing-room fire at Cliff Cottage, with her feet on the fender, taking herself to task very seriously.

That morning she had done a silly thing, a very silly thing. She had met Warrington in the High Street, Lynham, and she had walked the whole length of the street with him. Really it seemed rather a small matter to be distressed about, but the young widow was vexed

about it, and she was vexed with reason. First of all, it would give the Lynham people occasion to talk, and Maud Gainsborough could not afford to be cavalier respecting what people said about her. And in the next place—this was far more serious—that little walk up the High Street had been haunting her memory ever since.

She and her cousin had not seen much of Frank Warrington since the day of the hunt recorded in the last chapter. Once they had bowed on the esplanade, once they had met in the Lynhurst woods—there was a public way through a part of the woods—that day he introduced his brother who was with him, and the two men had walked a little way with them; and once they had exchanged a few words at a small public concert.

But how large a place the owner of Lynhurst had come to occupy in Maud Gainsborough's thoughts!

She was not in love with Mr. Warrington yet—at least, so she said to herself. But if she allowed herself to be always thinking about him, if she got talking with him and walking with him, Maud knew how it would end.

She had been in love before now—more than once. She knew all about all the symptoms of the complaint from its very earliest stages. And she knew, too, that she could make Warrington fall in love with her. Certainly she had no idea of the vows and resolutions he had been making to have nothing more to do with women. But, if she had heard all about them, she would not have attached the faintest importance to them: she would

simply have replied that she knew she could make him love her. And that was the most dangerous part of it all.

'And that is just what I am resolved to forbid myself,' quoth Mrs. Gainsborough to herself, mechanically plucking at the fringe of the fire-screen she was holding before her face. 'He shall not fall in love with me. I am not worth it, and I should do him a very great wrong. I should be drawing him into a match with a woman beneath him, for I *am* beneath him; and I haven't a halfpenny. And he ought to marry money, and to right his estates. I've done some things in my time that I ought not to have done, and I'll not add this to them to wrong that man.'

The man himself had taken a fancy to Lily. And Lily was just the girl he ought to marry. A good girl Lily, and with a

nice little fortune of her own. It would be a very fair match for Lily, and for Warrington a very good one.

A strange shadow passed in the young widow's deep eyes.

What a match it would be for Mr. Warrington if he only knew! If he knew, or Lily knew, or anyone knew, about that fifteen thousand a-year. But about that no one knew. So that was nothing to do with the case. Apart from that fifteen thousand a-year, it would be a very fair match.

The only question was, what would Lily do? Mr. Warrington was already far from indifferent to her, hardly suspecting that himself, apparently. But Lily, though she liked him, was taking her time very leisurely indeed to fall in love with him. Still, gently she was going that way.

The little witch was very attractive, and Frank Warrington was handsome and agreeable, and a very little thing might convince the two that they were created for one another. And these things happen so quickly. Two people meet in the autumn, and before the leaves are on the trees they have bound themselves indissolubly together to share all the pleasures and face all the perils of life.

Well, supposing Warrington and Lily did make a match of it, they would probably afterwards be very happy.

And here it must be recorded, to Maud Gainsborough's credit, that the consideration of the income she would lose when her cousin left her, and the evident fact that she would be brought back to the galling monetary difficulties in which she had found herself when she first came to

Cliff Cottage, had no weight with her at all to suggest to her that she should stand in the way of her cousin's happiness.

'I'll manage somehow,' she said to herself; 'no one knows what may happen between this and then.'

But her thoughts came back in another way to herself.

'That is all very fine. But if I do fall in love with that man, shall I have the courage to keep myself from making him love me?'

There were two women in Maud Gainsborough, and she had a dim consciousness of the fact. There was the Maud Gainsborough whose imagination was at rest; a not bad kind of young woman, with some faults, but with a good heart and plenty of judgment. And there was the Maud Gainsborough whose imagination had

caught fire. That was a young lady capable of a good deal: of a good deal more than Maud herself suspected. And if her imagination were not imagination of the brain alone, but the more subtle, and wilder, passionate romance of the heart——

'It will never, never do to let it come to that,' quoth Maud to herself; 'I should have him, if I ruined him. Only, how to prevent it?'

In the evening, after dinner, she said to Lily,

'Lily, what should you say to leaving here?'

'Leaving Cliff Cottage, Maud?'

'No, Lynham.'

'Leave Lynham!' exclaimed the girl, with surprise.

'I mean,' explained Mrs. Gainsborough,

taking note of the tone of startled astonishment, and lying diplomatically, 'if we were to go abroad, perhaps for a few months; say next month, when the days get a little longer. We might spend the spring in the south of Europe.'

'I should like to travel,' replied Lily, slowly. 'We might think about it, Maud.'

Again Maud Gainsborough took notice of the girl's tone, and of the phrase, 'We might think about it.'

Miss Hardwick had her tricks, and one of them was to say, 'We might think about it,' when, in her own mind, she resolved not to assent to what was proposed, but was too polite to say so.

So it was some minutes before Maud offered,

'It is dull here.'

'I don't find it so, Maud. I am very happy.'

Thought Maud: 'And so indeed am I.'

A longer silence ensued, whilst she reflected how quietly and peacefully pleasant the life was that they led: an existence that a good many people might have envied. A pretty little house, and a beautiful garden. Breakfast late, and neither of them particularly punctual in appearing at breakfast, if a longer and deeper slumber than usual made them late in rising, or a little beauty-sleep of another half-hour suggested itself as likely to be agreeable. And breakfast itself always rather dainty, as were all the meals; though they spent a great deal less time over them than men would have done under similar circumstances. Till luncheon there were the cares

of the neat little house, and perhaps a little exercise; after it walking, riding, or driving; for they could hack good horses, and they had a pony-carriage; paying or receiving a few calls, tea, and a lazy hour before dressing for dinner; and the long, careless evening; music, magazines, perhaps a game of cards. And, to conclude, upstairs, where there were fires in the bed-rooms, talk, as only women can talk after they have retired.

It would have been strange if they had not been happy.

Still, Lily's was a girlish, restless nature, and Maud had surmised that possibly the prospect of travel, movement, something new, might have distinct attractions for her. If it had not, it seemed to Maud that Lynham must have attractions not publicly admitted by the young lady, or,

more plainly, that things between her and Mr. Warrington had advanced further than Maud had supposed.

'After all,' she remarked, 'it is not of much use to talk about it. Very likely we should not be able to go, if we wished it. At least, you could always go, of course. But perhaps not I.'

Lily looked at her interrogatively.

'You mean?' she asked.

'You know what I mean, dear.'

'Something to do with that horrid old Anthony Gainsborough?'

'Yes. You see, I should have to get his leave.'

'His leave, Maud!'

'Oh, yes,' replied the widow, bitterly. 'I cannot go away from here without that. You see, he lets me have the place rent free, and, if I left it without consulting

him, he is as likely as anything to turn nasty, and to stop the allowance he makes me. And then, where should I be, dear? I could not live upon what my husband left me.'

And the widow leaned back in her chair, looking dissatisfied enough at the state of her case.

'If I were one-and-twenty, you should live with me,' answered the girl, with the natural generosity of youth. 'Never mind, Maud, I shall be one-and-twenty soon, and have all my money. Then we'll snap our fingers at old Anthony Gainsborough, and do as we like, won't we?'

To which the young widow said nothing. She had all the will to snap her fingers at her brother-in-law, and afterwards to do as she liked, but not all the necessary courage.

Lily noticed her silence.

'Maud,' she said, after a minute, 'what was it that happened between you and Anthony Gainsborough? I often feel awfully anxious to know.'—That was very true.—'If it is a secret, Maud, you may trust me with it.'

'I don't know that it is exactly a secret,' answered the widow.

'Then tell me, Maud, do!'

Maud Gainsborough seemed to hesitate for a moment. But, really, she was only asking herself why she should hesitate. She had not a sincerer friend in the world than this young girl, nor one more able to be of use to her.

'Well, then, dear, you shall know,' she said. 'But first, you must understand, darling, that you are a very lucky girl not to be married.'

'H'm. It is a species of luck which, if it be of too long duration, I am not sure that I shall appreciate. Still, go on, Maud.'

'It is one thing to be married, Lily, explained the young widow, 'and another to find marriages turn out as you anticipate; and of the two evils—I will grant you that both are evils—not to be married is a less one than to be married, and to discover that you have made a big mistake. *I* made a mistake. Mr. Gainsborough was in business: you know that. I believe that he worked very hard, and was successful and all that sort of thing. I have never been able to see how all that could be of the faintest interest to me. I know that I soon discovered that his not having a handsome independent fortune, as his elder brother had, would make a much greater

difference to us than I had supposed ; that the life we had to lead was hideously dull ; and that he and I saw all these things from exactly opposite points of view. He let me have a large house, and, although he said he could not afford it, allowed me this and that that I wished for, and——'

Maud Gainsborough sat up in her chair, and continued, in another tone :

'All that has nothing to do with it, Lily. To come straight to the point. I met a young married woman about my own age, who played—gambled, I mean. And I went to her house, and joined in the gambling. Of course, gambling is wrong, but, people may say what they like, there is no excitement under the sun equal to that of playing with stakes, the loss of which might make you uncomfortable. And I, who was awfully dull, got quite

wild about play, and I got up a little party of my own, and we used to play in my boudoir at afternoon tea for ever so much higher stakes than at Mrs. ——. I won't mention names. It was soon whispered about that the play at her house was not a patch upon what was going on at mine, and women left her to come to me, and I can tell you we had some scenes sometimes; and some excitement.'

'It must have been exciting, of course. Still it was awfully wrong, was not it, Maud?'

'It was, and, of course, we all knew that we should get into fearful scrapes if we got found out; we married women with our husbands, and the girls with their fathers and mothers. And now I am coming to Anthony Gainsborough. Of course, Mr. Gainsborough knew nothing about this

play; at least, at first. I had taken good care that he should not. But afterwards he had to know, for I lost a lot of money and could not possibly pay my debts. I had some trouble to get the money from him, but in the end I got it, and then, somehow, his business affairs went wrong. I never understood his horrid business affairs, so I cannot tell you how that was. All I know is, that one night he came home and made me a frightful scene, declaring that he was a ruined man, and sobbing like a great baby, and saying that he would have to be bankrupt. He fretted a lot about all this and made himself ill. However, in the end, he got some money from somewhere, and his brother Anthony lent him or gave him some more, and I understood that it was all to come right. I was in monstrously bad luck all that

time, and then, to crown it all, I had one most desperate afternoon. I won't tell you what I lost, it was something too dreadful.'

The widow paused, and remained silent for a minute. Then, leaning back in her chair, she went on :

'Of course, if I had *won* a lot of money, I should have been an angel. Only as I had lost it—I wasn't. And I *had* to pay my debts, or some of them. And Mr. Gainsborough had to let me have some money. And so he had to be bankrupt, after all. I suppose it was very disgraceful, and all that. I can't say I understood it, but Mr. Gainsborough upset himself about it, most tremendously. In the end he made himself ill, and the end of his being ill was that he died. The fact is that he was a man without a bit of pluck. The

only good thing I can say for him was that he kept my secret for me. For you must understand that all this time that he was ill I was worried out of my life with Anthony always about the house, wanting to understand how his brother could have been bankrupt after all, and I don't know what else besides. However, in the end Mr. Gainsborough died. The doctors said of some affection of the heart. It was not of affection for me. After his death I found that I had only the most miserable pittance, and began asking myself what on earth I was to do. Then Anthony called, and offered to make me an allowance of two hundred a-year, and to let me live here rent free, if I liked to agree to certain conditions. And one of the conditions was that I am not to leave Lynham without his knowledge.'

'You mean that you have to get leave to go anywhere, Maud?'

'Yes,' answered Maud Gainsborough, in a tone that expressed plainly enough how far she was from liking it.

'Even, say, to go up for a week to London.'

'Yes.'

'But, you really mean that this man actually said to you, "I'll let you live there, but the condition is that you never go anywhere without my leave."'

'He did not say it in those words.'

That was true. It had been said in words Maud would not forget so long as she lived. But she did not care to repeat them.

'And you assented?'

'I had to assent, you see.'

'I'd rather have swept a crossing!' ex-

claimed Lily. 'I'll tell you what it is, cousin,' she continued, 'I think what you did was awfully, awfully wrong. But I don't see what right Anthony Gainsborough had to put you into prison for it. What sort of man is he, Maud?'

'A man past fifty, tall, and rather handsome; with about as much pity as Herod,' answered Maud, quietly.

'I'm sure I shall hate him!' remarked Lily. Leaving her chair she knelt on the floor by her cousin's side, and putting her arm round her neck continued, 'Maud dear, you are not angry with me because I said just now that what you did was wrong? Because it was wrong, you know. Still, we were friends at school, Maud, weren't we? Do you remember how frightened I was the first day I came, and how kind you were to me. And we'll be friends

always, won't we? And as for that old Anthony Gainsborough, by-and-by, when I have all my money, you shall live with me, dear. And we will go where we choose, and do what we please, and not consult Anthony Gainsborough at all, the nasty old thing.'

Maud bent her head, and kissed her, and called her 'a darling,' and it was somehow taken for granted that, until Lily's coming of age put them in a position to set Anthony Gainsborough at defiance, things should go on as at present, and nothing more be said about leaving Lynham.

But when Lily had fallen asleep that night, Maud Gainsborough stole downstairs with her hat and cloak on, and, going to the little writing-table in the drawing-room, wrote a hurried note.

'DEAR MR. GAINSBOROUGH,

'When I gave you my word of honour not to leave Cliff Cottage without your knowledge, I received in return a promise from you that, if circumstances made my leaving necessary, you would at once allow me to go. Such circumstances have occurred; and I write to beg that you will allow me to go abroad for twelve months. I will live in any place you like to name. But please give me leave at once to leave England.

'Yours sincerely,

'MAUD GAINSBOROUGH.'

Folding the letter without reading it through, she put it in an envelope, and directed it to Anthony Gainsborough at his bankers.

Carefully opening one of the drawing-

room windows, so as to make no noise, she stepped out.

The January night was cold, dark, and cloudy. She only stopped for an instant to look at it, and then drawing the window shutters together, so that the open window should not be noticed from the lawn, she pulled the hood of her cloak over her head, and, stepping on the grass, made her way noiselessly towards the gate that opened upon the high-road.

Half-an-hour elapsed, and then the same cloaked and hooded figure returned across the grass, stopped before the verandah, looked stealthily around her, pushed open the shutter, and, with a long breath of relief, was once more safely at home.

No one had seen her.

She closed the window, refastened the shutter, and threw back her hood. The

room was cold, and the fire had burned low, but she sat down once more beside it.

She had done the best action she had ever done in her life; and her conscience told her so.

Where, she wondered, was Anthony Gainsborough? How long would it be before her letter reached him? How long before she received his reply? Would the reply come in time to be of any use?

The room was horribly cold. She would go to bed.

Eight days elapsed. In the course of those eight days, she met Warrington twice. They seemed to be fated to come together.

At last a telegram arrived from the Mediterranean.

'*Let me know reason why you wish what you ask in letter.*'

How was Maud to answer? Could she wire back. 'I am afraid I shall make a man fall in love with me.' Impossible!

She threw the telegram into the fire unanswered.

But she said to herself,

'So it is all up! Things must go their own way, now. What happens will be Anthony's fault. But God knows that this time I tried to do my duty; and that I hate the wrong that I am going to do to that man.'

And she dashed two big tears from her great, handsome eyes.

A singular character, Maud! What would prosperity, and a man able to guide her, have made of her?

CHAPTER XIV.

Love grows of itself, and of itself passes away; in a moment springs unbidden into being, and in a moment is gone like the perishing of a dream. Man has just as much dominion over it as he has over the forces of nature and the elements of the world, and no more. By knowledge and observation and contrivance and by favour of circumstance, he turns this too, as he turns tide, and the fire, and air, as he turns oxygen, and carbon, and gold, to attend-

ance on his pleasure and to the service of his will : and that is all. Independent of man, the tides roll on, and the great forces of nature unfold and exhaust their powers, and so love warms and cools, and man must abide it.

For a fortnight the ladies of Cliff Cottage saw nothing of their neighbour. The reason was simple. He did not hunt on the days they hunted, and all the rest of the time he was busy on the farthest part of his estate. Meanwhile came off the Lynham Christmas ball, one of Lynham's few gaieties. Frank Warrington did not go to it, and Maud returned home thankful, and Lily disappointed.

Two days afterwards fifty yards of the boundary wall of the Lynhurst estate fell flat into Mrs. Gainsborough's garden. When the gardener brought in the news at

luncheon-time, Maud Gainsborough said to herself: 'This is fatality.'

'We ought to send and tell Mr. Warrington,' opined Lily, as forward to find any good excuse for seeing or saying something to Mr. Warrington as her cousin for avoiding him.

Maud considered any such step unnecessary. Mr. Warrington would be sure to hear all about it from his own people.

In the afternoon, Maud being gone for a walk, Lily suddenly thought she should like to drive into Lynham. So she ordered out the pony-carriage, and drove down.

Once in Lynham, she drove several times up and down the parade, and then up the High Street, where her perseverance was rewarded at last with the sight of Warrington coming down the street.

He was a little surprised when she drew up beside him.

'Mr. Warrington,' she said, 'about fifty yards of your wall fell this morning into our garden. Perhaps you know all about it.'

No. He knew nothing about it at all.

Well then, the best thing he could do was to come and see. Would he drive up with her?

Warrington accepted the offer: and Lily drove him up to Cliff Cottage. On the way he offered many apologies for the conduct of his wall. There was not a wall on the estate that was not rotten to the core, he asserted. He hoped that this one had not done much damage.

Maud Gainsborough was still out when they arrived at the cottage. So they went to view the fallen wall together.

'What a pretty place you have here,' said Warrington, when that was done.

'Is it not?' answered Lily. 'Come down the garden, will you? It goes all the way to the cliff.'

So they made the tour of the garden, and talked about the flowers. There were a number of rose-trees, and already one or two tea-roses in bloom. Lily mentioned that in this little shaded glade, for such the garden was, her cousin and she were particularly successful with their early and late roses.

'I should much like my brother to come and see them,' said Warrington. 'I say see, though he can't see, poor fellow. But he is a great rose-fancier.'

And he went on to talk about the rosary Eustace had laid out at Lynhurst.

'And Mr. Eustace Warrington can tell

all his roses, and knows whether the plants are in good condition, and whether the flowers are all they should be, although he is blind?' asked Lily.

'It is wonderful what he knows, even that we who can see do not know: and what he sees that we cannot see,' replied Warrington.

That served them for another subject of conversation. Warrington invariably appeared at his best when talking about his brother, and Lily was so much interested that it was quite a long time before they returned from the farther end of the garden to the cottage. Maud Gainsborough had returned, and Lily insisted that Warrington must see her: and Warrington himself was inclined to think that it might look better if he did. So he consented to come in, and to accept a cup

of afternoon tea, whilst he repeated his apologies to the widow.

'Did he come to call, Lily?' asked Mrs. Gainsborough, when he was gone.

'No. I met him in the town.'

Maud smiled to herself. She knew all about accidental meetings of that kind.

The restoration of the wall commenced on the morrow with the removal of the *débris*, and went on for the next three weeks. Work was not wont to be very rapidly executed at Lynham.

But the number of casual meetings that took place between Lily Hardwick and Frank Warrington over the repairing of that fallen wall were wonderful. Of course, Warrington, like a prudent man, had to look after the work to see how it got on, and visited the spot, at least once,

often twice a day, to inspect progress, and to see that the men were not wasting their time. And then, if Lily was in the garden, or at the drawing-room windows, there was a bow to be exchanged, a greeting, a smile. And sometimes Lily would stroll across, and, warmly wrapped in her pretty furs, stand and talk for a few minutes; or else they strolled up and down together, sometimes on Mrs. Gainsborough's lawn, which was being sadly trodden down, sometimes on Warrington's path on the other side of the wall. Once, when Warrington had his brother with him, Lily insisted that Eustace should come and see the roses, and with her arm in his led him all round the garden, telling him the history of every one of their plants.

When the wall grew higher, there was no more possibility of stepping backwards

and forwards across it, but they could still meet, and stand on each side and talk; and for Warrington to lean his elbows on the wall, and to talk to Lily, whilst watching the workmen, or for Lily to rest her elbows on the wall and talk to Warrington, was apparently quite sufficient amusement for both of them.

'What a pity Mr. Warrington should look so much after the men building the wall,' remarked the widow.

She had only spoken to Warrington across it twice.

'Why?' asked Lily.

'They would have been ever so much longer about it if he had left them alone.'

'Of course. That is just why he looks after them. He would be robbed every hour of the day if he did not keep an eye on all those people he is employing.'

'Yes. But won't you and he be very sorry when the wall is done, dear?' asked the widow.

Lily knew what her cousin meant, and made no answer, only said to herself, 'I didn't think Maud could be so idiotic.' But the next day she did not visit the scene of operations. Warrington strolled over twice to see how his wall was getting on. But he saw nothing of Miss Hardwick.

On the third day, however, when he again came to look at the workmen, about eleven o'clock, Lily was strolling up and down the wide garden walk in the February sunshine, and crossed over to him at once.

If Maud liked to be idiotic, what did it matter to her? She supposed she could speak to Mr. Warrington if she chose!

And, besides, there was something she wanted to ask him.

Warrington was in wonderful spirits at that date. He did not know when he had felt himself so light-hearted, or in such vigorous health, or half so happy, and careless, and free. All the anxieties of the limited capital at his command, and of his mortgages, and of the considerable sum of money he was spending lay on him as light as a feather. He felt sure of himself, sure of his courage proving undaunted, and his patience equal to any demands. Success and good fortune in the future were quite secure. Everything was going right at Lynhurst. All he had done had turned out well. There were contretemps here and there, certainly—that wall which had tumbled into Mrs. Gainsborough's garden, and had had to be

rebuilt, just at a moment when he wanted the money for something else, and that dyke that had broken, and turned all the best meadows into a swamp. But everything could not be expected to go on perfectly smoothly in this world. And all he was doing now was getting on royally, and what he would do by-and-by would set all the rest right. That they should come down and live in this jolly old place, and rescue it from destruction was the happiest inspiration his brother had ever had. He never tired of repeating that. Life was become a delightful exhilaration, full of the keenest enjoyment from morning to night. He had never been so happy as he was now, trudging about the place all day long, working like a nigger, enjoying his meals with the appetite of a rustic, and entering into everything with the zest of

an enthusiast. Never had his brother and he led so merry a life : never known the days pass so gaily, the evenings so pleasantly, as since they had been in Dorsetshire. His good spirits even attained to that superlative degree which disposes a man to fall in, as far as possible, with the wishes of everyone under the sun ; and when the rector, after much searching of heart, at last found the courage to approach him on the subject of his never coming to church, he surrendered at once with a good-tempered, 'I know what you mean, Dr. Wood.' And the next Sunday morning he came to church.

At which the young ladies of Lynham turned up their noses, and said that he had come to hear Mrs. Gainsborough and Miss Hardwick sing in the choir.

He was in excellent spirits with himself about Miss Hardwick.

'Saw the little Hardwick again to-day,' he said to his brother, one evening at dinner. 'She was walking up and down in the garden, and we had quite a long talk. A nice girl that, a straight-forward girl, with no nonsense about her, and a good heart, I should say. Deucedly pretty too, and rides well; better than she thinks. I enjoyed a chat with her very much. The fact is, Eustace, there is a lot to enjoy in the society of women, if a man has only once made up his mind not to have too much to do with them. That is the secret of the thing. A man is not on his guard against consequences, and then he gets falling in love, and all that sort of nonsense. Or, at least, he knows that walking about and talking to a girl may end in his

marrying her; and that spoils it all. When a man has once had the sense to say to himself that he is not going to go in for any of that, that he means to keep himself within bounds, there is a lot to enjoy in the conversation of a straight-forward girl.'

All of which was very philosophic, only it was a strange thing that there was no part of the estate to which Warrington so seldom invited his brother to accompany him as to that wall bordering Mrs. Gainsborough's garden.

And, whatever Warrington's views might be, his pretty friend on the other side of that wall was beginning rapidly to entertain less and less platonic ideas of the situation, and to open her bright blue eyes very widely on the truth.

A great part of the wall was finished

right up to the coping-stones, when she began, in her counsels with herself, to rise rapidly through such degrees of confessed regard as, 'I like Mr. Warrington.' 'I *do* like Mr. Warrington.' 'I like him awfully.' 'I like him most awfully.' And then came a mild afternoon in February; one of those soft afternoons which tell that the spring is really coming. Maud was gone to a working-party at the rectory, for the widow much studied all the little things that provide a woman with allies. Lily, who made no pretence of liking working-parties, stayed at home, and that afternoon there was a long talk over the wall; Lily leaning against it, with one elbow rested on the top, and the low, westering sun shining softly into her lovely young face, and Warrington talking to her about—why, about nothing. A good part of the time

neither of them were saying anything, only the man feasting his eyes on the girl's exquisite face, as she stood with her eyes cast on the ground, and she simply happier than she could tell, merely because she was with him, because she 'liked him most awfully.'

At last they parted (for the evening shadows began to fall), and laughingly said, 'Good-night.' Their eyes met as he pressed her little hand in his, and she could not resist the temptation to return the pressure. 'She liked him so awfully,' and was so willing that he should know it.

But she did not go in. She only made sure that he was not watching her, and then turned and strolled down the garden towards the cliff slowly, slowly.

'I wonder whether I ought to see him so often, to talk to him quite so much?'

That was the question the pretty little head was pondering.

'I do like him so awfully, and I do feel so sorry for him, poor fellow. And I don't mind a bit if he knows it. But I should not like him to think me forward. He does not seem as if he did think me so; not a bit. Still——'

Fifty yards further down the garden she had got as far as:

'I should miss talking to him awfully, if I had to give it up. Still, I would rather give it up than have him think me forward.'

Fifty yards further:

'When the wall is finished, we shall have to give up our little talks. And that was what Maud said.'

And then she got to the edge of the cliff, and, leaning over the railing, stood watching the night falling over the sea.

'Why should I make a lot of words about it?' she thinks, slowly; 'I know the truth—I am in love with him.' And, though the words are unspoken, a hot blush scalds her cheek. 'And I am not ashamed to love him. He likes me, I am sure. And I'll be a good girl to him, and show him that girls can be honourable and true, and I'll make up to him for the way his cousin used him. I'll be good to him even if he should behave badly to me.'

There was only one blood-red streak left low down on the horizon, and she turned and went slowly back to the house.

'He has proposed to her,' said the widow to herself, the evening of the next day, when she reached her bed-room. And, white as ashes, Maud threw herself down

into a chair, and, with an agony in her heart, drove her teeth into her lips. 'Oh, my God!'

She put her handkerchief to her lips. There was blood on it.

But Warrington had not proposed. As a matter of fact Lily had not that day seen him. But there was a pride in her face, a dignity in her walk, a firmness in her step, that they had never had before. And her young lips were riper, and the meaning of her eyes deeper and fuller of the consciousness of life. And Maud had seen it.

'I could take him from her if I chose for all that,' said the widow to herself, standing before her glass regarding herself and reckoning how easy the young girl's defeat would be.

'And break her heart, poor little puss!

And she is happy! No, she shall have him. It will be better for him.'

But she turned away from the glass with a face full of bitter pain.

CHAPTER XV.

Two long, happy days Lily proudly kept her secret of golden sunshine locked in her breast; then, after thinking of the matter for a quarter-of-an-hour, she came to the opinion that the prettiest, frankest, and right thing to do was at once to be open with Maud, and to confide her love to her.

Frankness, and that artlessness which craves at once to communicate whatever has overfilled the heart, were a much larger part of her nature than reticence.

She had, besides, no wish to keep secrets from her cousin. She and Maud were one in heart and soul, one in tastes, in inclinations, in feelings, in everything—both of the same age within a few years; both mere girls, for Maud's stupid marriage had hardly been a marriage at all; and both, in their hearts, ready enough to fall in love with Prince Charming if he would only come and fetch them away.

At least so Lily thought. Some people would have told her that she was a little goose, and that she and her cousin were not alike at all. Only Lily Hardwick would certainly not have understood them.

Having resolved to take her cousin into her confidence, Lily did not wait long to put her purpose into execution. She made her avowal the very same afternoon, in

the twilight after afternoon tea. Seated on the sofa with her saucer and empty cup on her knees, she had suddenly dropped into a reverie so profound that she did not hear Maud Gainsborough ask her whether she would take another cup of tea. Maud, who, at the moment she spoke, was inspecting the contents of the teapot, receiving no answer to her question, looked round.

'How awfully pretty she is!' thought the widow to herself. 'It would really be a shame to disturb her. What a picture! I am afraid she has caught it very badly, though. Poor girl! I wonder how long she will remain in that exceedingly picturesque attitude?'

Lily appeared prepared to remain impassibly immersed in her dream for any period of time. So presently Maud Gainsborough softly rose from her chair and

came to her, sitting down at her side, and gently passing one arm round her, and then drawing her to her.

Lily let her do as she pleased; only once she glanced guiltily into Maud's eyes, and laughed a little nervous laugh.

Then, half-lying in her cousin's arms, with her eyes turned away, she said,

'I had something to tell you, Maud.'

'Suppose I have guessed it?'

Lily started, and disengaging herself from her cousin, and sitting up, looked her hard in the face. Then, bending forward a little, she said, softly,

'Maud, I love him so awfully—so awfully.'

An expression of acute pain shot across the widow's face. But, mastering herself, she took one of her cousin's hands, and began caressing it.

'I feel sometimes as if I should go quite mad—I love him so awfully,' continued Lily.

'And, Maud, isn't he handsome?' she resumed, after another pause. 'I do admire him so. I expect every other girl down here does too. But I don't care. They don't *love* him as I do: they couldn't. And, do you know, Maud,'—this in a lower voice—'I believe that he does not dislike me.'

Maud Gainsborough started. Hope, brilliant as summer noontide, had burst in an instant upon the blackness of her night. The man had *not* proposed. The girl was only flattering her heart with her own dreams.

'But, darling,' she asked, gently, in her soft, rich voice, 'he has proposed to you?'

'Oh! no, Maud! Only I love him so that I don't know even whether I want him to propose. To be engaged to him would be such awful happiness that I think I should feel half afraid of it. But I believe that he does not dislike me.'

'Yes,' thought Maud, 'I believe that, too.' But what a weight was gone from her heart! Aloud she asked, rather markedly, 'Already?'

'Why do you say, "already," Maud?' asked Lily, not quite pleased.

'You have not heard anything, then? There are people who say there was a cousin of Mr. Warrington's——'

'Well?' interrupted Lily. 'There was a cousin of Mr. Warrington's. What of it, if there was?'

'My dear, I was going to tell you, only you interrupted me. Some people say

that, only a very short time ago, Mr. Warrington was engaged to this cousin of his, a great beauty, to whom he was very much attached. And that it was only because the match was broken off that he came to live down here.' She looked at Lily, but Lily's face was inscrutable. 'If any of that is true, it seems to me that Mr. Warrington has not been *very long* in changing his mind.'

Lily had risen.

'What was his cousin called?' she asked, shortly.

'I don't know that anyone down here knows.'

'Well, then, I know,' returned Lily, quickly. 'Mr. Warrington's cousin to whom he was engaged is a Miss Chesterfield; and she is very pretty, and he was very fond of her, and—I know all about it.'

Folding her arms, she stood at a little distance, with her head slightly turned, looking down at Maud Gainsborough as if she would say,

'Now, then! You did not expect that, did you?'

Maud did not expect it. She said to herself, 'So, he has been making a confidante of her, has he?' That looked serious, and the expression of the widow's face changed.

The girl saw it at once, and followed up her advantage without mercy.

'I know all about it,' she said, flopping herself down in a little chair by the low tea-table. 'But that is no one's business but mine. Mr. Warrington was shamefully, shamefully used. And as to his having changed his mind "already," as you call it, I don't see that that has any-

thing to do with it. And, any how, I don't care. I wished to be frank and nice about it all to you, Maud. If you don't wish it, I can perfectly well hold my tongue. And so we will say no more about the matter.'

And, with considerable *sang-froid*, Miss Hardwick proceeded to pour herself out another cup of tea.

The widow knew how to manage her, and said nothing; only took up her needlework. Lily drank her tea in silence, and then sat looking at the fire. So passed half-an-hour, or more. Then Lily got up and came across to her cousin.

'I beg your pardon, Maud,' she said, kneeling on the floor by the widow. 'I got into a temper just now. It was all your fault, with that stupid "already," but I'm awfully sorry.'

'Come then, darling,' said Maud Gainsborough, good-temperedly, coaxing her back to her side on the sofa. 'Now, let me hear all about it.'

So, after all, the tender confession was made. But nothing would Lily tell about Miss Chesterfield. That was not her secret, and she would not be persuaded to communicate anything on the subject. It was disappointing, for the young widow was very anxious to be informed.

After all, though Mr. Warrington had not proposed, it seemed to Maud Gainsborough that things had gone pretty far, particularly as she imagined that what Lily knew about Miss Chesterfield she had learned from her lover. But still it would be an easy thing for Maud to do as she pleased with the young girl's pliant, confiding nature, and with her naïve, childlike love.

But Maud was still resolved to let things take their course.

'She will make him a better wife than I,' she said to herself. 'Or, at any rate, she will bring him some money. I will not come between them.'

CHAPTER XVI.

Warrington and his brother went to a dinner-party at the rectory. The dinner was dull, but the brothers met Maud Gainsborough, who, to do her justice, would have refused the invitation, if she had suspected whom she was to meet.

Warrington—now he had discovered how agreeable feminine society can be when a man has once made up his mind not to be in any danger from its fascinating wiles—would much rather have met Miss Hardwick. But she was not of the party.

Failing her, he made himself agreeable to her cousin, and with the assistance of Maud's conversation, which was bright and witty enough, got through the dull evening rather more successfully than the majority of the party.

Maud, too, had by this time invented herself a myth. So that now the only one of the three who was not acting a part was Lily Hardwick. Maud Gainsborough's myth was this: that she freely surrendered the man she loved to her cousin, out of regard for the young girl's feelings, and for the man's good. For the rest of her life she would herself be made happy by the reflection of their happiness, and by the consciousness of having, at the supremest moment of her existence, had enough nobility of character to sacrifice the great passion of her life to the welfare

of the man she loved. That was, however, no reason why she should not show herself to Warrington in her fairest colours. Rather the contrary. Some day he would hear the truth. These things always come out some day. And the more he admired her the greater the price he would set upon the sacrifice she had made him, and the higher the opinion of her which he would always entertain. Poor Maud! She enjoyed the dull dinner-party at the rectory that evening as she had enjoyed few things in the whole of her life.

A day or two afterwards came a letter to Lynhurst from General Chesterfield. It was an unlucky letter, and it came on an unlucky day, when Warrington was bothered about finding some ready money.

The general was not at all well. And

his medical adviser was entirely deceived about the nature of his complaint. With the general's medical adviser this was commonly the case, at least in the general's opinion.

At present the old gentleman had a bad touch of rheumatism, and the doctor did not choose to treat him for it. So the general was going to pay no more attention to anything that the doctor said. And, contrary to the doctor's orders, he had had some friends to a big dinner, and these had amused him very much by wanting to know whether the story of his granddaughter's escape from her betrothed was true. They had all laughed over the story until they had nearly fallen under the table in fits. Also, it was said at the club that Warrington had gone to hide himself in some hole in the country be-

cause he was ashamed to be seen after the Miss Chesterfield adventure. The general thought Warrington had better come up to town for a day or two and show himself. Also some one had put a report about the place that Warrington was so awfully cut up about the loss of Miss Chesterfield that he had become as lean as a lath : a report the general was not able to contradict because he did not know whether it was true or not. Thus the general in his letter.

Warrington lighted his pipe with the document. If his acquaintances in town thought he had hidden himself in some hole in the country because he was ashamed to be seen, they might think it. He did not care what they thought. And if they liked to believe that he had become as thin as a lath with fretting for Violet Chester-

field, they might believe it. He did not care what they believed.

Nevertheless, the letter made him cross, and when, to add to it, he failed in the afternoon to obtain some ready money he wanted, for which he had gone into Dorchester, he returned in the evening to dinner at Lynhurst irritable and in low spirits. Eustace did his best to cheer him, but with no success.

'Frank, old man,' he said at last as they sat smoking after dinner, 'there is nothing that puts a man so much out of humour with himself and with everything about him as attempting impossibilities. And the fact is we are attempting impossibilities here. We cannot afford all that we are doing. We must make up our minds to one of two things; either to do less for the place, to go in for all these repairs more

gradually, or else to live a little less like country gentlemen with plenty of money to spend. The place is costing us a great deal more than we meant it should. In my opinion, we are trying to do too much at once. And certainly we are trying to do more than we can very well afford.'

'Every month that things are left undone, the dilapidations become more serious,' returned Frank Warrington, rather gloomily. 'If I could have got that money this afternoon——'

'But you see you could not. You have already got as much as is to be had easily. Now, we must either be content to go on as we are, or else to be bothered out of our lives with loans. There is no third course, my dear fellow, you can see it.'

Of course Warrington could see it. But he was cross; and loth to admit anything in a reasonable fashion.

So, instead of answering, he only smoked in silence.

Presently taking a pipe, and filling it, he remarked,

'I think I shall look about for a woman with a lot of money, and marry her. There are women enough, no doubt, perhaps not quite of our own caste with whom it might be possible to live tolerably peacefully, who would not mind the match costing them a little money. Men marry mostly, sooner or later, some woman or another. And, as I am not likely to be troubled with any more sentimentalities on the subject, I might very reasonably look out for some advantage to result from the contract.'

'I think the first question is, whether you mean what you are saying.'

'Well, yes,' replied Warrington, leaning back in his chair, and crossing his legs. 'Say, some woman rather older than myself: a middle-aged woman: a widow. I feel distinctly in favour of a widow, she would have got over all the romance and the nonsense. A woman with some sense, of course. I have wondered in my time, like other young donkeys, at men making marriages with women of this kind, but I can see the sense of it now. I really believe that it would be a prudent thing to do.'

'And the lady is to agree to leave the tender passion entirely out of the question?'

'That is very simple.'

'I am not sure that you would find

it so in practice,' commented Eustace, thoughtfully. 'However,' he continued, 'the lady is not discovered yet.'

'Now,' resumed Warrington, 'there is Mrs. Gainsborough. Certainly she is not a middle-aged woman: and she has no money, so she would not do. But, if she had money, she is a sensible woman. And, at any rate, she is a widow. I was distinctly interested by her conversation the other evening at the rectory: and I should say that it would not be difficult to get on with her.'

'H'm,' said Eustace.

'You don't agree with me?'

'I agree with you that she is a widow: and that she is poor. That she has sense —yes. That you will persuade her to waive the tender passion—most certainly not. That she would not be difficult to

get on with. Well—I distrust Mrs. Gainsborough.'

'Indeed. Why?'

'Difficult to say, my dear Frank. Mrs. Gainsborough puzzles me. I am sure that I do not understand her; and yet I cannot satisfy myself that the prejudice against her, which I know I am contracting, springs merely from my inability to read her character. I won't say that she is insincere. No, I don't think that she is insincere. And yet——' he broke off, and concluded, 'I can't understand Mrs. Gainsborough: and that is a fact.'

'You don't think she would make a man a good wife?'

'Not one that he could trust.'

'Well, if a man wanted a wife whom he could *trust*—he would want what he would simply never find, I suppose.'

'There you are wrong. If a man wanted a wife who would prove an invaluable accomplice in something not quite straightforward, then I should say Mrs. Gainsborough was the very woman for him. If he could make her first of all passionately in love with him.'

'What has love to do with it?' demanded Frank, sceptically. 'Women don't love as we do, Eustace. They love themselves and their pleasures, nothing beyond. We regard them as animals not so very unlike ourselves, a little bit better in some respects, and a little bit weaker in others. But that, I assure you, is altogether a mistake.'

To which Eustace answered, very philosophically,

'The sense of mankind is against you, my dear fellow. Still, respecting Mrs.

Gainsborough, I may be altogether mistaken, for, as I have confessed to you, I don't understand her. However, she has no money, and so we need not trouble ourselves about her.'

'That is true,' admitted Warrington; and he puffed his pipe in silence.

Eustace resumed, after a few minutes' silence,

'Now, if you could do without a widow it might be easier to find what you want. If a tolerable sort of girl, with a pretty little fortune, who would not mind putting her hand to the work of rescuing Lynhurst from destruction, would do for you?'

'Thanks. I have had enough of girls. Only pray who may this very easily discoverable lady be?'

'You don't know?' asked Eustace, significantly.

'No. I certainly don't,' answered Warrington, quite honestly.

'A young lady: a very decent sort of girl: an heiress: with a nice little fortune: distinctly pretty: and, I assure you, quite ready to be asked to be mistress of Lynhurst, as soon as you like.'

'You speak in enigmas, my dear Eustace. You mean one of Sir Robert's girls? They are not heiresses. Miss Welsley? she is not pretty. I give it up.'

'Guess again. I am talking of some one of whom you have seen more than of any of those; a neighbour of ours; tall; recently much interested in the building of your wall.'

'Miss Hardwick? My dear Eustace, you are talking nonsense.'

'Not at all. The girl is in love with you.'

'Then I am sorry for her,' remarked Warrington, shortly.

'Why?'

'And besides, I have told you that women do not fall in love.'

'In that case, then, there seems to be no reason for being sorry for Miss Hardwick. Nevertheless, I should say that she was distinctly smitten. If you don't believe me, take some opportunity of judging for yourself. If you find that I am right, Miss Hardwick is, by your own admission, a sensible, straight-forward sort of girl. She certainly has a pretty little fortune as soon as she is one-and-twenty. You are not going to be troubled with any sentimentalities; so she will do for you as well as anyone else. And you can't do better than marry her.'

'And pray what on earth should she

marry me for? For the pleasure of sinking her fortune in Lynhurst?'

'Not at all. For the sake of providing herself with an agreeable husband.'

Warrington laughed, and Eustace joined him, but went on in another tone.

'You don't know it, of course, my dear Frank, but you have recently developed an exceedingly ugly trait.'

'Very likely. Let us hear what it is.'

'You are turned into a mysogynist. But it is still a fact that, when you are with women, no man could be more studiously or successfully agreeable to them than you give yourself the pains to be. As soon as you leave them, you abuse them without mercy; and I partly believe that you think what you say. But permit me to observe, that your conduct is rough on the ladies, who are irresistibly

attracted towards you as one of the nicest of men, without the faintest suspicion of the other side of your character. Into this trap Miss Hardwick has walked.'

'Then she should have known better.'

'Still, it is open to you, who are not troubled with sentimentalities, to take advantage of her mistake if you choose.'

'Only, my dear fellow, I don't choose. I certainly am not going to propose to Miss Hardwick—about whom, besides, you are, I believe, mistaken.'

There was a little pause, and then Eustace asked,

'Only, seriously, Frank, I am desirous to know one thing. If I am not mistaken, if Miss Hardwick would have you, why would you not have her? There is no sentimental motive at the bottom of all this.'

'Certainly not.'

'Well then?'

But Frank Warrington made no reply.

Gradually a little smile began to play around Eustace Warrington's fine lips, and he continued, rather banteringly,

'I suppose it is not necessary to imagine that you have had a smite as well as Miss Hardwick, and are, in consequence, tender about her feelings. Falling in love is a habit like anything else, and when a man once gets into the way of it, he goes on, eh? *Qui a bu boira.* Now, I remember that your weakness for Violet began very much in the same fashion, a quiet and rather platonic liking, just as you and Miss Hardwick made friends over that wall; and——'

'Eustace, shut up, and don't be a fool,' interrupted Warrington, abruptly, but

with perfect good-humour. 'We have had too much of this nonsense. Let us take out the chess-men.'

'By all means,' assented Eustace.

He crossed the room to where the chess-table stood, and, bringing it, began putting the men on the board, thinking, meanwhile, in himself:

'Frank is honestly convinced that I have been talking nonsense; he doubts that the girl can care at all for him, and is entirely unsuspecting that he is smitten himself. All in the dark, just as he was the last time. Strange. How blind these people are who see!'

Warrington was in the dark entirely, and honestly convinced that his brother had been talking nonsense. And yet the next morning, strolling out after breakfast, he did think of some of the things

Eustace had said. He reflected in himself thus:

'A man does not pass straight from being jilted by one girl to making a fool of himself over the next one he meets. And I think I am honestly cured of the weakness of falling in love. For which reason, I don't mind admitting without hesitation that Miss Hardwick has her good points.'

'It is possible that she may have taken a small fancy to me. Probably she does not see too many men. I have the reputation of being a bit of a woman-hater. And to captivate a woman-hater flatters the vanity of a girl. I helped her in a scrape, too, and she is, very likely, a bit romantic.'

A matter of entire indifference to him, all of it. Still, he was a trifle curious on

the subject. If he wished to know, he had only to take Eustace's advice, to observe the young lady, and to judge for himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FEW days later, wending his way homewards from a long solitary walk, he was overtaken—it was in one of the most unromantically muddy of lanes—by Mrs. Gainsborough and Lily Hardwick returning home from an unsuccessful outing with the hounds. They had drawn blanks at all the covers. The lane led up a steepish hill, and Warrington walked some little way by the side of their horses. The widow, gradually passing in front, left him and Lily to talk together.

Lily, with a little laugh, made some allusion to their being apparently destined to meet always under difficult circumstances.

'The first time it was the tide, Mr. Warrington. To-day it is hopeless mud. Did you ever see such a slough?'

'I suppose I ought to tell you,' replied Warrington, 'that the pleasure of meeting Miss Hardwick——'

'Has made you imagine the lane was quite dry,' laughed Lily. 'That would have all the essential qualities of a real compliment, would it not? falsehood, fulsomeness, and utter incredibility. You have been for one of your long walks?'

'Yes.'

'All alone?'

'Yes.'

'What a shame it is, Mr. Warrington, that you are so unsociable. Why do you

not hunt oftener? and why don't you try to help us all to get up some fun in this dull place? Why cannot you even bring your brother to see my cousin and me? We have expected you every Wednesday.'

'You are very kind.'

'I think we are, to wish to see anyone so very unsociable,' said the girl, archly. 'Do you know, I shall soon feel tempted to believe what I hear said of you, that you are a regular morose, crabbed misanthrope.'

'Dear me: is that what they say of me?' asked Warrington.

'It is: and you look as if you rather liked it. Only, now that I come to think of it,' she continued, 'I am not sure that it was not that other long word which was used.'

'Which?'

'Oh, I am not going to say it, for you to laugh at me: the word that means that you don't like ladies.'

'Mysogynist?'

Lily nodded mischievously.

'Well, perhaps it is true, you see,' remarked Warrington, in a rather quiet way.

He would give her to understand that he did not much care for ladies, and see how she would like it.

'What? That you are a woman-hater, Mr. Warrington? I can hardly believe that,' answered Lily, on the spot.

'Why?'

'It is so mean. You don't think so? But I do. When I hear girls speaking against men, saying they don't care for them, dislike them, hate them, prefer their

own sex, and all that, I always think it sounds so cowardly, so poor-spirited, just as if they did not know how to hold their own with men. And if that sort of thing is contemptible in a girl—what must it be in a man?'

'Well, I have no wish to contradict a lady,' answered Warrington, surrendering with ready grace.

'No, no,' put in the girl, quickly, 'you shall not get out of it in that way. That is just a trick you men have. I would much rather hear you say anything than that you should pretend to give in to me at once, and still all the time think the same as before.'

'You wish for the pleasure of defending your sex, Miss Hardwick?'

'Add at once, "and of having the last word of the argument like a woman,"' re-

turned the girl. 'But I assure you you wrong me. Come now, let us be honest. I promise you, solemnly, that I will not defend my sex. I will hear whatever you may choose to say, and answer nothing. But you, in return, shall tell me what it is that you really think.'

'I am afraid it will be too bad.'

'Well, say it all the same.'

Warrington was fain to comply. Here was an opportunity to see whether she would care what he might think of women, including herself. But to frame the exact things he should say was difficult.

'I am waiting, Mr. Warrington.'

'Then, if you must have it, I am afraid, Miss Hardwick, that women, at any rate young women, are not good for much—rather selfish, untrustworthy, cold-hearted

creatures, specious enough very often, I will grant you, but very treacherous.'

'Well, I don't think you need say any more. You could not make us out much worse than that,' said the girl, rather discomposed.

His words had grated on her feelings, and he could see it.

'Those are really your opinions?' she asked, after a moment.

'Well—yes.'

It was plain that she would have liked to dispute what he said; but she had given him a promise not to argue with him, and she meant to keep it. She only turned her face away, certainly with an expression of pain, and presently asked,

'You make some exceptions, I trust?'

'Oh, the present company, you know,' answered Warrington, lightly.

'Oh, of course,' returned Lily, with some acidity. 'We know that that means nothing. I am sure that I don't wish you at all to except me.' Then, quickly resolving not to be guilty of an exhibition of temper, she went on, good-humouredly: 'However, I made you tell me, didn't I? So you will justly think me very silly if I am cross about what you have said.'

'And, after all, what people say matters very little, does it not, Miss Hardwick?'

'It matters sometimes.'

'You mind what people say of you?'

'I mind what people I like say of me very much indeed,' answered the girl, simply and unaffectedly. 'And, Mr. Warrington, I gave you my word that I would not dispute with you; but I am very

sorry that you think of us all like that; I am indeed. I may say that without breaking my word, may I not? I think such opinions are unworthy of you. And, if I had the right to ask a favour of you, I would ask you as a great favour to try to think differently.'

'Impossible, I am afraid.'

'Quite impossible?'—she spoke very prettily, softly, in a tone of the gentlest persuasion.

They had reached the level, and Maud Gainsborough, a little in front, waited for them to come up. As Warrington made no answer to her last question, Lily went on, good-temperedly,

'Still I hope, Mr. Warrington, that you and I are none the less good friends; and I must try to turn out not so bad as you think me.'

They came up with Mrs. Gainsborough, and Warrington wished the ladies 'good-bye,' and they trotted on.

But Warrington caught, as Lily bowed to him, a shadow of pain in her blue eyes.

Turning out of the lane, he strolled slowly homewards across some fields. There was perhaps something in what his brother had said. The girl did evidently care what he thought of womankind, and so of herself. But, after all, he did not see that much could be inferred from that. Perhaps she had taken a little ordinary liking to him, as to a man who had made himself agreeable to her, and perhaps she was a little vexed to see there was not much prospect of her liking being reciprocated; though, for the matter of that, he was quite prepared to admit that, as girls go, she was a good enough sort.

'And after all,' he concluded to himself, 'women do not fall in love. Possibly the better sort don't pretend that they do. And, if Eustace knew as much about it all as I do, he would know that.'

And Lily meanwhile reached home, and, whilst Warrington was still crossing the meadows, drank a cup of tea, standing in her riding-habit before the drawing-room fire, and answering, rather at random, such remarks as her cousin made to her, so that Maud said to herself,

'Have they had a little tiff, then?'

Once in her own room, Lily was able to sit down by the fire, and to give herself up entirely to her reveries.

'I did not think he had got so far as that,' she said to herself a little sadly.

But if her love could win him to think better thoughts?

Was it strong enough, that love; strong enough for a battle with his disbelief in all love?

At last she gave it up, saying to herself: 'I love him, and I know no more. If I love him enough, I shall succeed. If I fail, it will be because I have not loved him enough; and then it will be better for both of us that I should fail.'

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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